



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



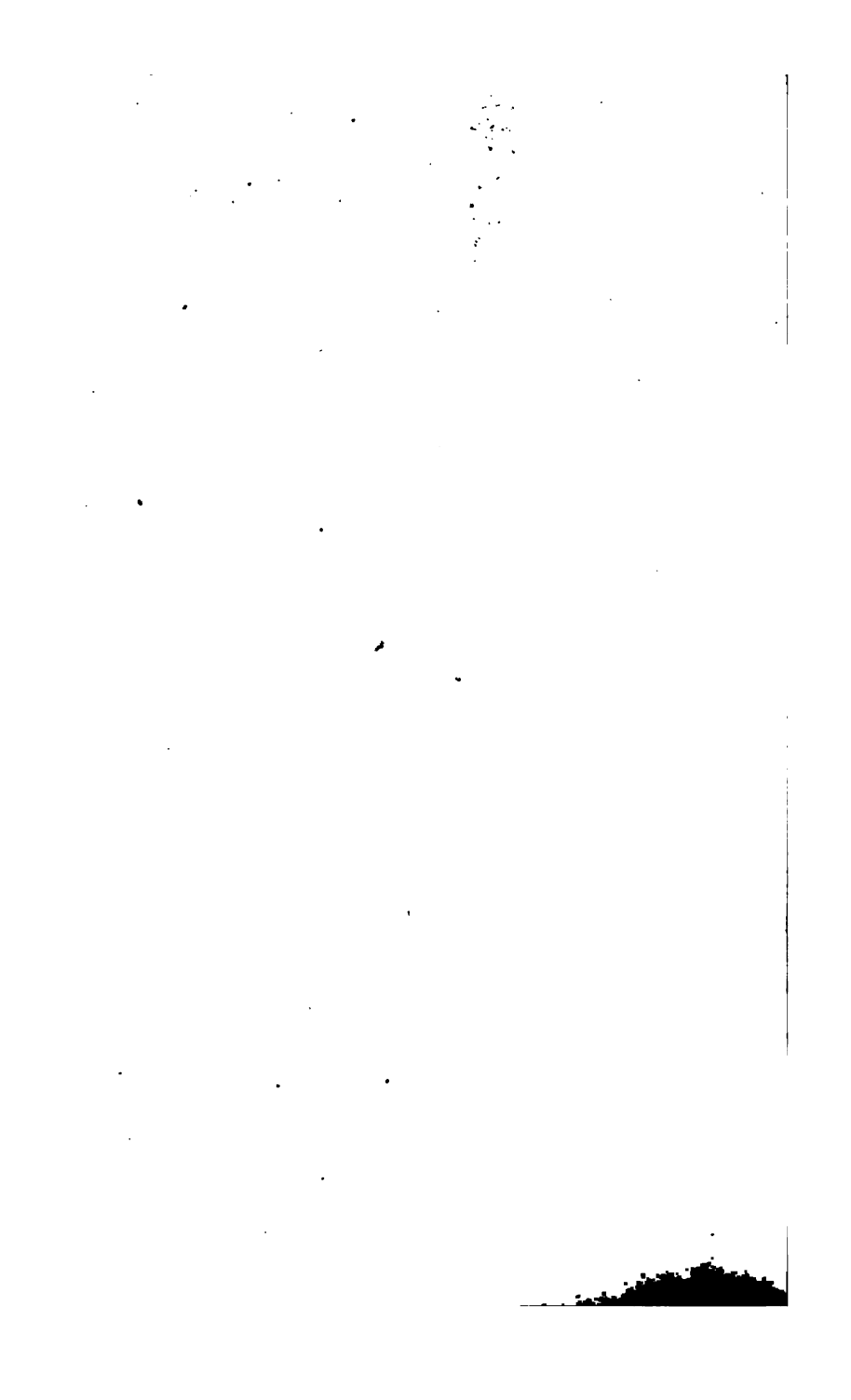


049067V

35.

257.



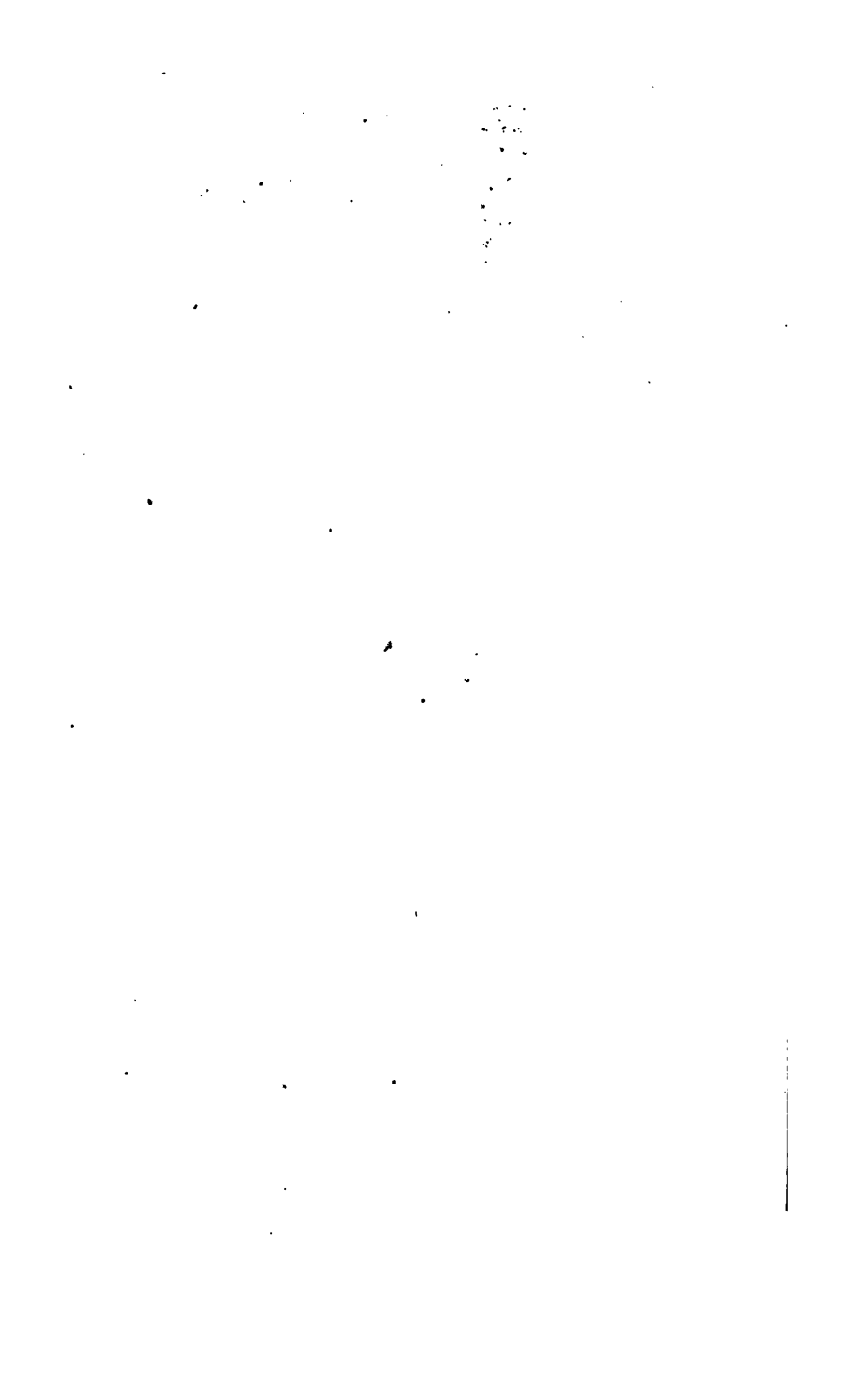




600049057V

35.

257.



P R E F A C E.

THE design of this work is, not to comment largely on particular promises of Holy Writ made to the afflicted Christian, but to set forth a few great principles on which a thoughtful and feeling mind may repose in times of trouble. A just apprehension of these principles will serve, in numberless cases, to keep the heart from needless anguish, guarding it at the same time against delusions which might produce a treacherous peace.

LONDON:
GILBERT & RIVINGTON, PRINTERS,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.



PREFACE.

THE design of this work is, not to comment largely on particular promises of Holy Writ made to the afflicted Christian, but to set forth a few great principles on which a thoughtful and feeling mind may repose in times of trouble. A just apprehension of these principles will serve, in numberless cases, to keep the heart from needless anguish, guarding it at the same time against delusions which might produce a treacherous peace.

the cup of salvation. One purpose of this book, is to remove this source of painful disquietude—not by the metaphysical discussion of a subject of stupendous difficulty, and which, as it relates to the *moral* government of the Deity, metaphysical arguments can never settle—but, by a simple appeal to *the moral character of God*.

The great object is to bring the heart into a state of calm and sacred repose. But the heart cannot rest sweetly on God, while He is believed to do that Himself, which he has condemned in others, while He is represented as acting towards His own children in a way which, if imitated by them, would be denounced as the last violation of justice and of mercy; while, like the priest and the levite, He turns away from the miserable, and passes

by on the other side! God is sovereign, and God is just. But any representation of these attributes, which, by necessary consequence, subverts our trust in His goodness, strikes at the foundation of all religious confidence, and every human hope—it cuts up the very roots of the tree of life.

Let it not be said, that, on the principles of those who contend for the doctrines of free agency and probation, God is equally the author of sin, the first great cause of evil. There is this distinction. The rigid predestinarian resolves everything into the Divine decrees—even the introduction, or the permission of sin, for the glory of God. That is, God decreed the existence of moral evil, that, by having the opportunity of inflicting punishment, He might display his own sanc-

tity. This scheme of theology not only admits the existence of evil, but proposes an *explanation*, which we consider at variance with the first principles of moral goodness, and subversive of moral government. The advocates of liberty, and of trial, are involved in no such consequences. They leave the difficulty *unexplained*. The existence of tremendous evil is a *fact*, independent of all systems of theological belief. But the question is disposed of very differently by the opposite parties. The predestinarian assumes, that the introduction, or permission of evil, was matter of Divine decree; and the question is, how to reconcile this with the goodness—nay, the justice, of God, in the perdition of man? The advocate for human liberty assumes the goodness of God—assumes the probationary character of the present. Dispen-

sation, because any other scheme is pressed with inexplicable absurdity, and impiety; and when his principles fail to account for the actual sum of sin and misery, instead of adopting a theory which at once demolishes all confidence in the love of God, he cleaves to that love, as the last, the only hope of man, and leaves the mystery to be solved in the great day of consummation. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

The author touches with extreme reluctance on this irritating controversy, in the introduction of a work intended to lift the mind above the stormy element of passion, that it may listen, in quietude, to the "still small voice" of heavenly mercy. He desires to guard, as much as possible, against any misconstruction of his principles. Entirely

to escape, is a happiness too great to be looked for in the present day, when no writer is spared by the malice of party, unless he be deemed too insignificant for notice, or too formidable for attack.

ACLE, NEAR NORWICH,

Sept. 29, 1835.

CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE I.

	PAGE
Consolatory View of the Divine Character and Administration	1

DISCOURSE II.

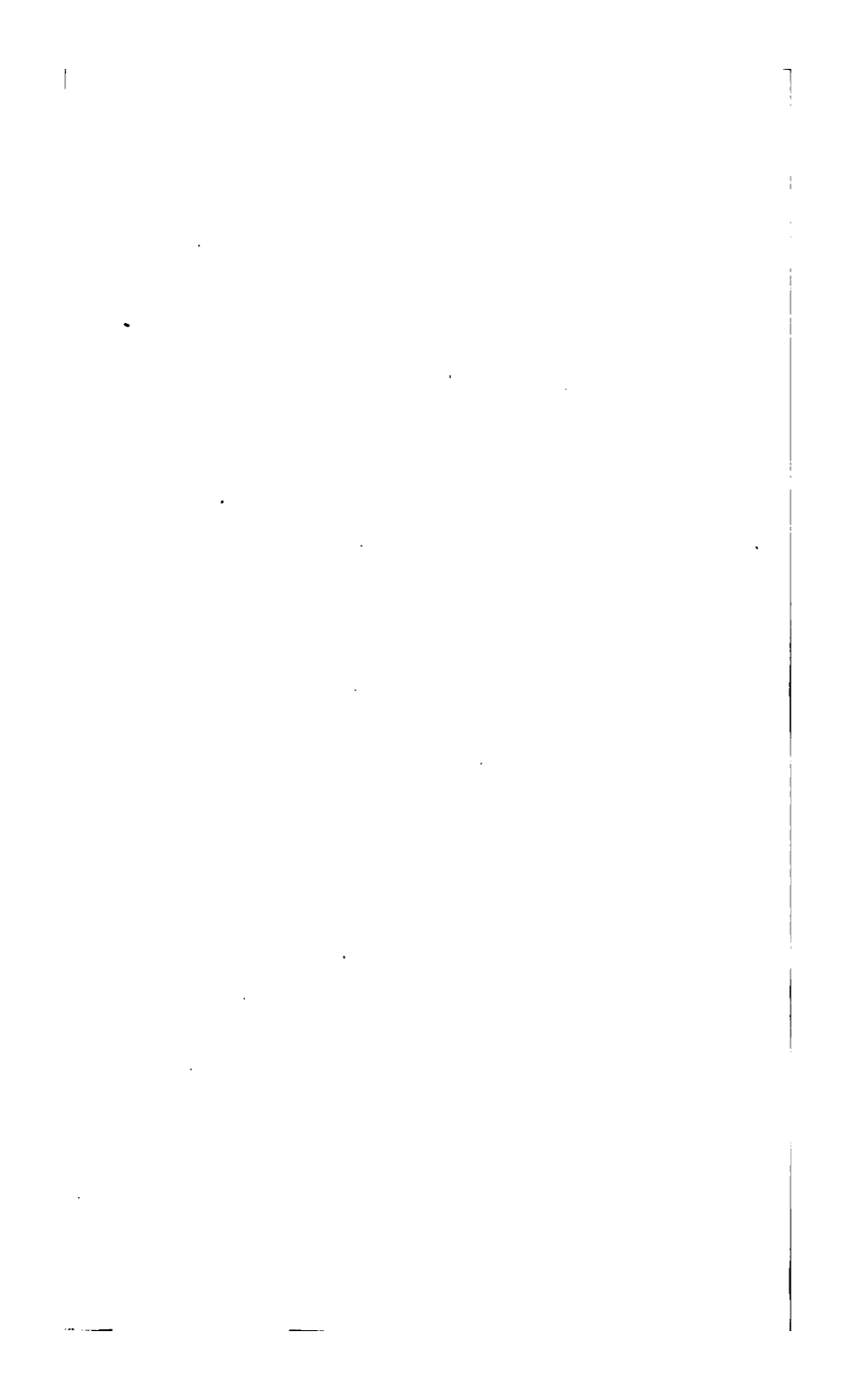
Considerations particularly applicable to the Afflictions of the Righteous	34
--	----

DISCOURSE III.

On Inward and Spiritual Troubles.....	64
---------------------------------------	----

DISCOURSE IV.

The tendency of the Christian Faith to produce an habitual elevation of mind, and joyousness of heart....	94
---	----



DISCOURSE I.

ON THE DIVINE CHARACTER AND GOVERNMENT.

PSALM xlii. 10.

Be still, and know that I am God.

THE existence of evil, moral and physical, is one of those undeniable truths which command the universal assent of mankind ; and the man who might choose to deny it, would be regarded, not as expressing an honest conviction, but as wantonly dealing in paradox. On the *origin* of evil, there does not exist a similar concurrence of opinion. That question is perplexed with difficulties, corresponding with its magnitude ; opening a boundless field of speculation to the metaphysician, and of

controversy to the theologian. Intimately connected with every subject relating to religion and to morals, and, consequently, to all the higher concerns of man, it has, in every age, occupied and interested minds of every order, as the great problem, the solution of which would pour a flood of light on the deep things of God, and demonstrate the rectitude of the Divine administration. The solution, however, has never been found. The difficulty exists, at this moment, in all its original force—a colossal barrier to the progress of inquiry—a mountain of perplexity, whose summit is inaccessible, whose centre cannot be pierced, whose base cannot be undermined. There it stands, in frowning majesty, wrapt in darkness visible; a monument, from age to age, and from generation to generation, of the vanity of man—of the immensity and unsearchableness of God. We approach it, and we shrink into conscious nothingness: we gaze on it, and a voice of mystery issues from its cloudy covering, which suppresses into awe the pride of human intellect, and

reminds us, fearfully, that we are touching upon hallowed ground. "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known !"

The appalling *fact* of the existence of evil remains, to baffle our researches, and to try our faith ; to fill us with deep and anxious terrors, or to drive us to the hopes and the refuge of the Gospel. "The misery of man is great upon him." There are moments in which we feel it, to an amount of amazement and of agony !

Sometimes, the persuasion is forced home upon us, by the calamities which, in various forms of guilt and suffering, afflict the general mass of human society ; or fall, with more ponderous pressure, on the weak, the defenceless, the unprotected victims of injustice and oppression.—

" War, famine, pest, volcano, storm, and fire,
Intestine broils, oppression, with her heart
Wrapt up in triple brass, besiege mankind."

At other times, our own immediate afflictions absorb and fix our thoughts, plunge us

in distress, and leave us without leisure, without power, to mingle our sympathies with the mass of human sorrows. We are racked by bodily pains, or we sink in helpless languor, under an ineffable feeling of exhausted nature, which makes the load of life heavy almost beyond endurance. We are pierced with anguish of soul. The friend in whose truth, and honour, and love, we confided, proves false and unfeeling, and “mocks the tear he forced to flow!” The child we almost idolized, sickens, dies, is buried out of our sight. “*Me* have ye bereaved of my children!” We consign to the grave all that gave to life its deepest interest, to home its sweetest charm; and we prepare to follow, in loneliness and in grief, to the same resting-place of the dead. “And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her!” There are sorrows more bitter than bereavement or death. We cherish a son with parental tenderness. By the culture of his mind, we aim at the formation of a character ennobled by moral sentiment,—by generous feeling,—by humane

sympathies,—by a profound reverence of truth and God. We sacrifice ease, and property, and a thousand personal comforts, to his prospects and advancement in life. Our only return is base ingratitude. He forsakes his father's house;—he renounces the domestic charities, the sweet and hallowed sentiment of filial love;—he associates with the refuse of society;—he brings down our grey hairs with sorrow to the grave!—

To each his sufferings : all are men,
Condemned alike to groan!—
The tender, for another's pain,
Th' unfeeling for his own!

The numberless ills of life are seen to operate variously on individuals, as their minds are differently constructed or disciplined.

In some, they produce deep, malignant, sullen murmurs; a spirit of fierce or gloomy discontent with themselves, with the destinies of the world, with the providence of God. Others are driven to the indulgence of an artificial levity, or a daring recklessness. They

ON THE DIVINE

will not calmly and firmly look danger in the face. They blink the realities of human life, endeavouring to persuade themselves that good and evil are alike the creatures of imagination, and striving, in opposition to the insuppressible dictates of nature, to give a joyous coloring even to the awful and tragic scenery which sheds a kindred darkness over the human soul. Alas! they strive in vain. The truth rushes on them, at last, with irresistible conviction: they fall victims of ills against which they had made no preparation; their laughter is the crackling of thorns, and their joy is turned into weeping and bitterness. They pass from the frivolous merriment of artificial excitement to terror, and agony, and finally, to the stern, appalling quietude of despair. It is not in human nature to stand out, eventually and successfully, against the tribulations which assail us, if left without better resources than heedless levity, or the cold and heartless dreams of an irreligious philosophy. Very different from these are the effects produced by affliction on the

spirit of the devout Christian. They may perplex and harass the soul, but they are, nevertheless, rendered beneficial, as they call forth acts of more exalted piety, and produce the consciousness of a more profound resignation to the will of heaven. Afflictions, in themselves, are "not joyous, but grievous;" but God is our refuge in time of trouble! And the views which we are taught, by Christianity, to take of the Divine character and dispensations, are such, as not only to enforce submission, but to inspire hope amidst the dark and disastrous revolutions of human life.

It is not, perhaps necessary, as a preliminary to the further pursuit of this subject, to admonish the afflicted, that the consolations of religion can only be appreciated by a *religious mind*. To none but those who have faith in God can they be presented with success. "If there be any consolation in Christ"—it must be for those alone, who in the spirit of Christian humility and trust, repose with simple reliance on the grace and the faithfulness of Heaven.

I do not propose, in this discourse, to enter into minute particulars, by applying the several topics of Christian consolation to the individual trials of the faithful. I take a wider range, presenting to your contemplation those general views of the Divine character and administration, which may impart solace, or inspire confidence, in those hours of gloomy speculation or awakened sympathy, in which we are oppressed by the common miseries which infest the family of man. At the same time, it may not be irrelevant to remark, that these general views are applicable, with certain qualifications, to every particular instance of human woe, since they hold forth to all the goodness of God, and the righteousness of His ways. He whose government on its grandest scale of operations is good, cannot fail to be equally good in every particular act relating to an individual soul.

Be still! and know that I am God!—our murmurs are to be suppressed, our anxieties to be quelled, our tranquillity to be main-

tained amidst the tumults and the terrors of life, by an unwavering confidence in the perfections of the Eternal Mind!

1. The character of God, in connexion with the relation he sustains to his intelligent creatures, is a ground of submission and of hope. God is good, supremely, infinitely good. The infinitude of God may be predicated, not simply in regard to what we usually call his natural perfections, but equally in reference to his *moral* attributes. His goodness no more admits of any assignable limits than His wisdom or His power. And the possession in all their boundless plenitude of these attributes, underived and uncontrouled, involves by necessary consequence the rectitude and grace of the Divine procedures in every thing that concerns the dominion of the universe and the destinies of man. The absence of that goodness which takes pleasure in the happiness of others—the want of that righteousness which does justice to the fair claims of others—always argues defect, weakness, contraction of soul,

an incapacity to discern the entire bearings of any question, or the remote tendencies of any system of conduct. Defective goodness can never subsist with the intelligence of an infinite mind, which discerns what, under all circumstances, is best—and can have no possible motive for acting but in harmony with its own views of good and evil; and the unbounded possession of wisdom and of power are sufficient pledges, that we may repose, with most profound serenity and fearless confidence, on the Dispensations of Heaven. GOD IS LOVE!—With His ineffable goodness, his transcendant benevolence, there can be nothing really at variance in any department of the Divine government. If there are evils which now appal by their magnitude, or harass and confound by the rapidity of their succession—they will be found ultimately resolvable into some principle, or traceable to some origin, not at variance with the character of Him who is perfect reason, perfect rectitude, perfect love!—The entire testimony of Scripture, direct and incidental,

establishes the fact, that the Divine government is *paternal*. We are all *His offspring*, who hath made of one blood all the families of men that dwell upon the face of the earth. And we are assured, in terms of inimitable beauty and tenderness, that "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him; for He knoweth our frame, He remembereth we are dust!"—This is a fact antecedent to all the doubtful disputations of men, all the conflicting dogmas of theological controversy. Every persuasion which assumes the contrary, subverts the first principles of religious faith and trust, and carries on its front the stamp of impiety and error.

Our convictions of this most consolatory fact are enfeebled by a variety of causes: and we consequently lose the serene and holy joy which it might inspire—which it *would* create—if we could at all times say—Abba! Father!

The want on our own part of filial sentiments, our broken and reluctant obedience,

induce the disbelief of His paternal love to us.—We cease to be dutiful children, we expel from our hearts the affections due to the Great Parent, and at the same time, by a process easy to be understood, we forget, that amidst all our waywardness, our ingratitude, our unfilial revolt, God is still our Father! We cannot dissolve the relation that subsists between the Creator and the creature. We cannot by our wickedness and impiety make God evil. We may be worthless sons: but, injured, affronted, opposed as He may be by our base impieties, God is nevertheless our Father!—He delighteth not in the death of a sinner!

We lose sight, moreover, of the Paternal character of the Deity, in consequence of false and Anti-Christian doctrines, resting, not on moral reasoning or apostolic truth, but on metaphysical abstractions, whose contrariety to the first principles of moral science, and to all sound views of equity and of grace, demonstrate them to be spurious in their origin, as they are often fatal in their results.

We first of all calumniate the Sovereign of the universe by misrepresentations of His moral government. We embrace a theology, which by direct implication makes Him the author of sin and death—or which represents Him, equally with wretched mortals, bound by the adamant chain of an antecedent and inexorable fate. We suppose Him to send his children into the world so constituted, in their physical, their intellectual, their moral nature, that they *must* oppose the will of God—must sin—must perish—that they must, as by the impulse of an eternal necessity, rush on in a downward course of moral turpitude, from the cradle to the tomb, formed and predestined to inevitable perdition. We exonerate the sinful and disobedient from the guilt of their transgressions, by making their departures from God, the unavoidable result of that nature which God himself has given them—and *then*, we represent the All-righteous Spirit of truth, of honour, of love, as visiting with unquenchable wrath, the crimes, which, according to this stern doctrine of *necessity*,

have originated in His own will, and were designed for His own glory! We forget that God tempteth no man, and that the abuse of his own moral faculties, and nothing else, can ruin the soul of man, or cut him off from communion with his Creator and with happiness. We forget that we are making the Great Spirit, not a father, but a tyrant. Yet, doubtless, God *is* our Father! And all the misconceptions of the faith of Christ, which would transform our veneration of whatever is lovely and majestic, into gloom, and dread, and suspicion—all such corruptions must be obliterated from our Creed, before we can calmly and sweetly rest our souls on God!—We may incur his anger by our sins. We may justly be appalled by his rectitude, as the injured parent or offended sovereign. But let us not confound our evil deeds with his acts of goodness—let us not imagine, that, without most daring and criminal presumption, we can impute to him the disorders entailed by sin upon a fallen race—nor suppose, that because we are regardless children,

he is an unfeeling parent !—Ah, no !—Rob the Deity of his paternal character—invest his throne with attributes of stern and iron-sceptered tyranny, make it plain that he delights to create only that he may have the opportunity to destroy—and you veil the universe in mourning, you throw over the hopes and the destinies of man, the shadows of an eternal night !—The elect themselves may be deceived ! Better that the sun be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood !—The material world may be wrecked, and I still keep my hold upon my God ! But let my confidence in his goodness be broken, and all is over,—I perish in despair !—The love of God, the deep and tender interest he takes in the destinies of the human family—is the brightest truth of the everlasting Gospel ! It beams from the Cross in mild effulgence. It is seen in the redemption of the Church, in the removal of sin, and the abolition of death. And the joy of proclaiming it to a guilty trembling world, was the motive which warmed the zeal of the first mission-

aries of our faith. "Therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe!"

Be still, and know that I am God!

II. It is a consideration, most consolatory amidst the evils of the present state, that it is a state of moral probation, of trial and of discipline, and that the sufferings to which we are exposed, as well as the series and combination of events, are subservient to the designs of God, in relation to his moral government. In many respects, the present condition of human nature is a mystery. We have not knowledge, we have not faculties, to discern the more distant bearings and relations of the mighty system of things, of which we form a part, and in which our final destinies are implicated. It is but a part, an extremely minute portion, that we see of the vast, the immeasurable, the infinite, which forms the dominions of Eternal mind. But, if any one thing is satisfactorily made out, it is, that the present system is one of proba-

tion, for the trial and formation of character; training up the mind by a process of instructive discipline, and the heart by the purification of its passions, for the future state of blessedness. The idea of probation is discountenanced by those who embrace, with all its consequences, the doctrine of fatalism, or, which is practically the same, that of rigid and unconditional predestination. But the question is, not whether a doctrine squares with a plausible metaphysical argument, or with popular prejudices, but whether it accords with moral truth, with the dictates of conscience, with the constitution of our moral nature, and with the tenor of the sacred testimony. And there is no point on which I feel a more deep conviction, after pursuing the subject in all its known bearings, and after a thoughtful reading of the most distinguished writers on every side of the question, than that the present state of man is *strictly probationary*,—that, as the subject of a moral economy, he is a candidate for Eternal life;—or—that we are *totally* in the dark respect-

ing the most momentous question that can interest the human mind ; that is, WHAT IS THE DISPENSATION UNDER WHICH WE ARE PLACED, and what are our responsibilities, our prospects, our relation to God !—Mere fatalism is inconsistent with the existence of moral agency—with praise or blame—with reward or punishment—with human responsibility and retributive justice—with sin and grace—with law and gospel—with the day of final reckoning. On that scheme, neither our sins nor our virtues are our own. We are mere machines, worked by a power foreign to ourselves ; and that power is the only real agency, whether for good or for evil, in the universe. Life, then, is probationary. We are under a scheme of moral government, training for immortality. And here we see, at least, one way of accounting for the sufferings to which we are exposed. They are part of a system whose end is to discipline our characters, to subdue our passions, to correct our vices, to admonish us of the danger of sin, to form us to habits of self-

restraint and self-government, to call into action our mental and moral powers, and to awaken devout aspirations of the soul after the purer abodes of light and life, where the faithful dwell for ever with Christ, in the glory of the celestial kingdom.

The sufferings we endure may be classed under two heads—the *punitive*, and the simply *afflictive*—those which flow manifestly, and as by a law of nature, from our disobedience to the will of God, as, for instance, extravagance leads to want, inhumanity to scorn and hatred, and crime to public infamy:—and those which we cannot so directly trace to the sins of the individual, but which we rank with the ordinary incidents of life, and which are rather to be considered as trials of character, than inflictions of retributive justice. In either case, there is mercy! By the first class of sufferings, we are warned, that “Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.” By the second, we are led to the exercise of calm and religious submission to the Divine will. By both, the ends of a probationary state are an-

swered. Our levities are chastised. We are awakened from dangerous insensibility. We are fortified against temptation. Our moral faculties are brought out. We rise into more immediate communion with God, as the fountain of joy, and cease to repose our confidence in the dreams and shadows of this transitory state. Tribulation worketh patience—patience experience—experience hope—and hope maketh not ashamed.

This is but one view of the evils of the present state, but it is one of rich consolation. It is in exact accordance with our first position, that the Divine administration is *pater-nal*;—that love presides over the great family of God;—and that the temporary evils he inflicts, are not the capricious acts of a despot, nor the wanton sport of malignant power, nor the blind agency of fate sternly pursuing its mysterious course, and crushing resistance and hope; but the chastenings of a Father's love, who is educating us for a higher state of being, by a process which, if we do not wilfully reject our own mercies, will render us “meet

to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

To those who desire to see this subject discussed, in a manner equally philosophic and devout, the chapter of Dr. Paley "on the goodness of God," will afford a high degree of satisfaction. "Of all views," he says, "under which human life has ever been considered, the most reasonable, in my judgement, is that which regards it as a state of *probation*. Many things in it suit with this hypothesis, which suit with no other. It is not a state of unmixed happiness, or of happiness simply;—it is not a state of unmixed misery, or of misery simply;—it is not a state of retribution;—it is not a state of punishment. It suits with none of these suppositions. It much better accords with the idea of its being a condition calculated for the production, exercise, and improvement, of moral qualities, with a view to a future state, in which these qualities, being so produced, exercised, and improved, may, by a new and

more favouring constitution of things, receive their reward, or become their own."

Such a view of human life, with all the evils and all the miseries of it, is cheering and hopeful. While every other supposition is perplexed with absurdities, or exhibits the moral attributes of Deity in awful collision with each other, this approves itself to our reason and our piety. It gives an intelligible character to this state of mingled, fluctuating, conflicting interests. It is worthy of the Supreme Mind, and helps us to keep in view his GOODNESS—the only refuge of man under the deep consciousness of frailty and sin. It opens to us, moreover, a scene of incalculable interest, by connecting the present with the future; thus divesting human life of that character of littleness, which attaches to a brief and transitory existence, and stamping on every thought, and every deed, a momentous responsibility, from its relation to our eternal destinies. The human family, on this scheme of things, is no longer a race of fugitive beings,

sporting in the beams of the mid-day sun, and perishing before night ; but a world of intelligent minds, of moral agents, thrown upon circumstances infinitely varied, but in no condition, “from that of the best-instructed Christian, down to that of the rudest barbarian, which affords not room for moral agency.” We behold innumerable generations of human beings, ascending—under the parental care of God, and through a discipline which renders them active co-operators with Him in the accomplishment of the mighty result—from infancy, and ignorance, and frailty, and heedless passion, and the very nothingness of the present state, to an elevation “hard by the throne of God ;”—to the intellectual stature of angelic minds ;—to seraphic purity ;—to the vision of Christ, and the everlasting fruition of the Father ! “And they shall see his face, and there shall be no night there, for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever !”

Be still, and know that I am God !

III. Having arrived at the preceding con-

~~clusions, a variety of other considerations,~~ subordinate to these, but intimately related, present themselves to the mind, confirming our trust in Him, who is "the God of all consolation."

Amongst others, but of paramount importance, it is delightful to bear in mind, in connection with His gracious purpose of training up many sons and daughters for future glory, that the government of God is *universal*; and, consequently, that no effectual impediment can be opposed to the final accomplishment of the designs of Heaven. "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things." The goodness of God lives, operates, triumphs, amidst the seeming confusion which perplexes the human mind, and disappoints its calculations. From this universal bearing of all events on the great consummation, nothing can be excepted, but the wilful obstinacy of guilt. The soul can perish only by its own suicidal act. And if, in the case of those who are obdurately wicked, the ends of a moral administration are not satisfactorily

answered, their ruin rests with themselves; the malignant abuse of their mercies alone could have destroyed them, and the Father of all will not cease to be adored by the faithful, as the fountain of joy, and life, and love !

The universality of the Divine Providence includes, of necessity, a regard to the minutest particulars; and, to suppose that any individual being, or any occurrence, however incidental, escaped the notice of the Supreme Intelligence, is to suppose an impossibility. How impressive, how awakening, is this thought — *all things* working together for good ! since it connects the idea of God with every other idea ; and while it supplies us with a topic of consolation in every instance of trouble, makes every object and every event subservient to the culture of religious sentiment.

We have not faculties to scan the operations of a mind, to which all other minds are open and known, and to whose intelligence are present—in their order, their series, their connex-

ions, their influence upon the destinies of individuals and of empires—the entire succession of thoughts and emotions, of the myriads of human beings from the creation of the world to its dissolution. Our minds labour in vain with the stupendous conception. But the impossibility of realizing the powers of an infinite intellect, serves only to establish more firmly our faith in the inexhaustible resources of the Deity, and instead of nourishing a spirit of distrust fills us with joy and peace in believing. We learn to measure our prospects and to indulge our hopes upon a scale of grandeur commensurate with our ideas of the grace and majesty of our great Parent; and we feel, that if to any of the lesser and temporary interests which concern us, there is a degree of uncertainty attached, there is nothing really to be apprehended with dread or anxiety, for that our ultimate objects, our moral and spiritual welfare are secure, while the resources of the eternal mind are pledged for our eventual, our immortal happiness. The petty griefs and fears of life

relate to transitory objects, and the more harassing originate often in the consciousness of our ignorance or our weakness. By a living faith in the immensity of that power which we behold in God, we escape from the habitual sense of our own littleness, and take refuge from ourselves and the world in the all-sufficiency of the Deity. The true source of a calm and sublime felicity is, first, to obtain just notions of the Supreme Being, till we love and adore him—and then, to see God in every thing, and every thing in God!—Not only does the scheme of Providence, in its great outline, and governed by general laws, bear a determinate relation to the renovation and perfection of the souls of the faithful, but every minute particular in the series of events, is under the controul of that stupendous and benign intelligence, which not more certainly guides the planets in their courses, kindles or extinguishes the orbs of Heaven, wings the seraphim, than it marks the fall of a sparrow, and numbers the hairs of

our head,—an intelligence to which nothing is great and nothing is little!

By the narrowness of our views we are rendered incapable of tracing the *entire scheme* of Providence, or we should perceive the good and happy tendency of every arrangement, of every successive movement and change of human affairs. In the meantime, dark, bewildered, perplexed, as we are by the “mighty maze” of things, we are not to despond through our ignorance. Many circumstances may occur, in the complicated interests of life, affecting ourselves, our friends, the Church of Christ, or the family of man, which we cannot decypher. But in every such case, we shall abstain from sullen murmurs—no distrust will harass our souls. The scene is gloomy, but God is there! Universal dominion implies particular superintendence. The lot is cast into the lap, but the disposal thereof is of the Lord. “Therefore, my soul trusteth in thee, yea, in the shadow of thy wing will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast!”

Let it not be supposed from any suggestions that have been presented to you, that I mean to divert your regards from the many and appalling miseries which await our passage to futurity. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." Not to be conscious of them, is to be unfeeling, as the nether millstone. The stoical philosophy that affects to deny them, or to despise them, is degrading to human nature. It rests upon the extinction of our finer, nobler sensibilities. It robs the human mind of all that is graceful in our manhood. It brutalizes the soul. But it is the province of religion to supply us with an antidote to the sorrows which we must endure, and to render them salutary. We do not pretend to remove all difficulties. We cannot explain the whole of the mystery of human existence. We see clouds and thick darkness still surrounding the throne of the Eternal, and throwing out gloomy shadows over the face of the troubled world. But upon that cloudy covering there sleeps the rainbow, beautiful emblem of peace

and of Heaven. God is there—and God is Love!

Be still, and know that I am God!

I have not dwelt in this discourse on the consolations that are peculiarly *Christian*, and applicable to believers as such. We have taken generally the broad ground of the *paternal* character and government of God, because, *there* lies the deep foundation of all religious faith and hope. On no other basis can we erect an edifice of immutable consolation. We could not, for instance, put confidence in any of the divine promises; we could not regard the great provisions of the Gospel for our eternal redemption, as other than doubtful or delusive; we could not be sure that the very elect might not be deceived, if we did not proceed on a previous assurance of the truth, and goodness, and unsullied faith of the divine character. To a serious and reflecting mind, it would signify nothing that the Gospel was full of “great and precious promises,” if it could not be first ascertained, that He who had promised would be faithful

to His word. And I have no proof of that faithfulness, unless I can rest on the *goodness* of the DEITY!—It is not enough to tell me, that God is sovereign and righteous—that resistance to his will is hopeless—and that I must bow in still submission, though there may be appearances of severity, of stern and ruthless despotism, in his procedures. Such notions are insulting to the moral character of God, and utterly subversive of human hope. Mere sovereignty, however mighty and majestic, can only impress awe—if it assumes a menacing aspect it may create dread—if it seems to lay aside mercy and truth, and to put forth the naked arm of power to crush the helpless misery of man, it may strike the soul with the deep stillness of despair!—It can do no more. It cannot awaken trust, nor soothe the mind into devout resignation to the will of Heaven. To put my trust in God, when I walk in darkness and see no light, I must love him with filial reverence; and I cannot do that, if I think him harsh, capricious, prone to indulge in wanton tyranny, saving or

destroying in obedience to the dictates of an arbitrary and capricious will. The first broad outline of his administration, must be such as to leave upon the heart the indelible impression that God is love—and then, and not till then, can I say—"Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him!" I press this thought with earnestness, because it is a vital point. Multitudes who are deep sunk in the waters of tribulation, and who are incapable of realizing the consolations of the Gospel, would find, on examining their feelings, that their morbid depression sprung from want of faith in God. They distrust Him. They do not cordially believe that He is good, that He is merciful, that He has no delight in the death of a sinner, that His great design is to raise up a monument to His eternal praise of the souls of men, renewed after His own image in true holiness. They have been unconsciously, but deeply, impressed with mistrust of the Deity, by the repugnant views which have been given of Him in systems of scholastic or popular theology, as separating his own glory

from the happiness of his children. Could they but realize the paternal love of God, as a fact which events have obscured, but cannot disprove—could they behold Him ruling to bless and to save—could they remember that Christ, weeping over the sinners of Jerusalem, was an expression of the Father's tenderness and grace—they would instantly feel that the sweetest incense they could offer was that of a penitent heart, and that to repose on infinite love, in the spirit of the faith of ancient believers, of Abraham, of Moses, and of Daniel, could not but draw down upon them the blessing pronounced upon those, of whom it is testified, that "they pleased God." Tyrannic power may delight in impressing fear and dread, but to Him who is rich in mercy we offer the most acceptable homage, when we flee for refuge to the shadow of His wings !

DISCOURSE II.

CONSIDERATIONS PARTICULARLY APPLICABLE TO THE AFFLICTIONS OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

ISAIAH xl. 1.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

THE general course of events, as we have already seen, is made tributary to the purposes of God in his moral government. The mass of evil, appalling as it is to the imagination, will be rendered subservient to the trial and purification of innumerable human beings. Physical evil is opposed to moral as a corrective and a remedy—and it may be received as an axiomatic truth, that if the sufferings of men were fewer, their transgressions would

be multiplied, and the human race would be precipitated into a course of progressive and rapid degeneracy. And, viewed in this impressive light, the miseries of the world, great as they are, instead of undermining our confidence in God, illustrate his goodness; since he exhibits a far more exalted benevolence in inflicting pain, which shall operate to our advancement in moral excellence, and qualify us for a more extensive happiness hereafter, than he would do by consulting our present ease at the expense of our nobler destinies.

Having once arrived at the conclusion, on satisfactory evidence, that the Divine government is moral, remedial, parental, it is not necessary to our consolation, that in every particular instance of evil to be endured, we should trace its *direct* bearing upon the merciful designs of Heaven. It would betray ignorant presumption, to expect that we could follow the footsteps of the Eternal, when his way is in the deep. It is enough for us to know, that "The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth,

fainteth not, neither is weary!" In what we *do* know, we have a warrant for implicit reliance when he doeth "great things and unsearchable." Having, indeed, given us an ample demonstration of his character, as our Heavenly Father, it is not improbable, that one reason of the mystery and the gloom which He throws over the aspect of events, is, to try how far we have learned to cast ourselves with filial trust on his care—whether we really believe that he is good.

But we are not confined to the general considerations already stated. To those who are the children of the adoption by faith in Christ Jesus, the Christian Scriptures open a large field of consolation, by giving particular assurances of the Divine favour, to every individual who lives in communion of spirit with the Redeemer, and in Holy friendship with God.

There is an exact adaptation, in the Scriptures, of facts and promises to the actual condition of human nature. Infinite love is seen stooping to meet the fears and anxieties

of our feeble state. Our doubts, our apprehensions, our embarrassments, are beautifully, mercifully anticipated. Provision is designedly made for them; and the consolations of the Gospel are found, by the happy experience of believers, to be the most appropriate remedies for sorrow and despondency, administered by that Saviour, who “never breaks the bruised reed.” But for the light that is thrown upon this subject by the sacred page, it must be admitted, that the fact, that the faithful are doomed “through much tribulation, to enter the kingdom,” would be itself a difficulty exceedingly perplexing, and hard to be reconciled with their interest in the love of God, or with the nature of the Christian redemption as a remedial œconomy for the abolition of all evil. Our ignorance or our impatience might have suggested, that it was natural, it was reasonable, that they who accept the proffered grace, who are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ,—that *they*, should be put into a state of immediate happiness. Or, that if they were not at once

removed from this world of tribulation, they should at least be distinguished from the profane and irreligious by an exemption from the calamities which sin has more obviously brought upon man. Instead of this, the ordinary course of Providence is common to all. The external circumstances of life are the same to the righteous and the wicked. The same sun fertilizes their fields and ripens their harvests; the same storms sweep across their path, or burst upon their heads; they drink the common cup of good and evil, which the hand of Providence holds out to all mankind. The faithful have sorrows, moreover, peculiarly their own. The more refined their sentiments, and exalted their views, the more acute their moral feelings,—the more are they liable to have their sensibilities deeply and frequently wounded. The expansive and generous soul presents a broader surface to the shafts of calamity and of grief!—Nay! it is not uncommon in the history of the Church of God, to find religion and tribulation in close alliance, or inseparable companion-

ship. Devoted love to God has often been the signal for the hatred of men—and a great fight of afflictions, cruel mockings and scourgings, bonds and imprisonment, spoliation and death, have been the portion of men, whose crime was their fear and reverence of God—their magnanimous adherence to the dictates of conscience—the moral grandeur of soul which rose above their times, awakening the envy and malignity of an age, of which they were at once the victims and the glory—men of whom the world was not worthy.

The spirit of persecution has been confined to no party. The profane and unbelieving are not alone in this crime. Good men—in other respects good—are prone to resent as a personal injury any deviations from the opinions or observances of their own communion. None have endured more severity of treatment than those who have called down upon themselves the intolerance of party bigotry, by daring to expose old abuses; or the violence of democratic wrath, by resisting the rashness of popular innovation.

While multitudes in every community find their interest in a servile adherence to existing systems, or to the passions and prejudices of the vulgar, suppressing or concealing their own convictions, acting with the many when they think with the few,—the man who, regardless of himself, thinks and acts, although with calm moderation, in the spirit of independence as the servant of truth and of God, is pitied for his imprudence, and defamed for his integrity. He is persecuted in the house of his friends. It is a fact not to be contemplated without depressing emotions, that, of the eminent men whose private worth and public virtues adorn the page of history, not a few were the victims, while living, of malignant persecution, or died to satisfy popular vengeance. How many of the best and greatest of men have been doomed to waste their lives in obscurity, in exile, in hopeless captivity, as if, instead of exalting our common nature by their talents and their virtues, their superiority was regarded as a libel upon the species. A dungeon and a lamp have

been grudgingly allotted by their contemporaries to those, to whom succeeding ages have assigned the most illustrious place in the temple of fame. And who will not find in the celestial world a sphere too large for the exercise of their immortal powers.

What shall we say to these things? To this difficulty the Scriptures supply a solution, in entire accordance with our previous view of the Divine dispensations. That solution is to be found in the fact, that the *entire course* of our present existence is a state of trial, a state of probation, that, even as Christians, we do not cease to be on our trial as soon as we can cherish the hope that we believe on Jesus Christ, and are reconciled to God; that the subsequent progress of life is to try the sincerity of that faith; and, if it be genuine—a faith of the operation of God, to purify us by suffering, as one kind of moral discipline, for eternal life.

The Scriptures present us with two considerations, which the faithful may especially apply to themselves for consolation in trou-

ble, that their trials are sent in mercy, and that God will support and deliver. Under these all subordinate heads of consolation may be classed.

I. There is a necessity for your afflictions, as children of mercy, to be trained in the school of Providence. Supposing the existence of the present order of things, they are inevitable, nor can your salvation be secured without them. We might sit down and imagine other systems of being, which do not exist, and never will exist. We can conceive ourselves to be placed under a constitution, totally unlike the present mysterious economy. We might think it possible that God should miraculously interpose to renovate and perfect all our moral faculties by an instantaneous act of grace, and in less than the twinkling of an eye translate the children of adoption from earth to heaven. But that is not *His* way of proceeding; nor are we to judge Him foolishly, because He does not regulate His dispensations by our infantine dreams. He puts us all under a moral eco-

nomny, in which, although it is an economy of grace, Divine agency does not supersede our own active powers, and in which our ultimate elevation is suspended on our co-operating with God in a course of self-education and self-government. The Christian redemption, with its unsearchable riches of grace, is but part of that economy, and subservient to its ends. And, in perfect accordance with it, we are exhorted, even as believers, still to watch and pray, still to beware of false confidence and delusive assurance. Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall ! Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ! Quench not the Spirit ! Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure !

Your afflictions are *necessary*, to prove to *your own satisfaction* the reality of your trust in God, and thus to put upon solid ground your assurance of an interest in His love, as a blessing on which you may calmly and sweetly rely. We are not ignorant of the very opposite views which obtain currency, sanctioned

by names of distinguished reputation, advocated by individuals who would be among the last, consciously and knowingly, to uphold a system of priestly empiricism or popular delusion. You are told that one moment you may be in the gall of bitterness, and the next have the inward witness of being a child of God. The process of regeneration is said to be momentary. The first act of simple faith in Christ is described as the seal of your redemption, and the ground of filial repose in God. We do not wish now to enter into the subtleties of a disputatious theology, nor to ascertain how much of abstract truth, or of hollow sophistry, there may be in this way of presenting the subject. It is sufficient, that as a practical statement it is false in *fact*, discountenanced by the tenor of the sacred writings, and of dangerous tendency. God addresses you in other terms, and His dealings are of another kind. He first invites you to embrace Him as your reconciled father in Christ Jesus. He gives you promises of pardon and redemption, on your

believing His testimony; and fleeing for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel. Your heart is touched, you profess to believe and to love God, and confide in the wisdom and rectitude of all his plans. And how does He then address you in his Holy Word? Does he instantly say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of your Lord!" Does he treat you as a person fully justified, that is, as perfectly righteous, by making you perfectly happy, without farther experience of pain and sorrow? Does he even say, "All is well—your faith is indubitably sincere—it is infallibly of the operation of God: henceforth, none can separate you from the love of Christ?"

" More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits above !"

No, He does not say this. He pronounces no definitive judgment—He says nothing of instantaneous assurance! but what he does say, amounts to this :—"You have witnessed a good confession; you avow your belief of

My truth—your reliance on My grace; you love, you reverence My Son;—so far all is well. But the heart is deceitful above all things. I must put you upon your trial. Go. “And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity. He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” Go. And be “patient in tribulation, faithful unto death!” The course of providence accords with this—not the triumph of the victor, but the march of the combatant—trials, perplexities, conflicts, tribulations! And that faith only is accounted sincere, which, amidst the adversities of life, cleaves to God, goes to Him as a father, yields submissively to His will, saying, “It is the Lord! let Him do as seemeth good in His sight!” We are prone to imagine that we shall always be ready to serve and trust

in God, when we are first awakened as from a sleep to behold his loveliness and glory in the redemption of the Cross. The perpetuation of these impressions is quite another thing. Shall we be equally calm and hopeful in the exercise of religious confidence, when called to enter into deep waters?

Nor is this all that afflictions are to do for us in our course of probation. They are to quicken, to expand, to invigorate our Christian graces, to "gird up the loins of our mind." As the crucible detects the dross, proves the metal, and returns it free from impure mixtures; so the trial of your faith worketh patience: no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards, it worketh the peaceable fruits of righteousness. On this most interesting point, the Scriptures are copious in practical illustrations and living examples. The most illustrious of the servants of God, under the old and new dispensations, were formed and disciplined in the school of affliction. Nowhere are we taught that by one

simple act of faith, by one simple act of surrender to God and his mercy, we are reckoned righteous, or receive the seal of final perfection. Faith is reckoned to us for righteousness, not as a mere act of belief, which by a talismanic power, saves we know not how, but as a principle of deep piety, which receives the Divine testimony, and improves the successive events of life, even the fiery trial, to the enlargement of our trust, and the closer communion of our spirit with God. Where there is a living faith, that holy principle gives to every trial a salutary influence, and sanctifies every sorrow of the heart. Under its dominion, what turbulent passions of the soul does not affliction suppress ! It subdues our pride, and imbues us with profound lowliness of spirit, by teaching us our nothingness, our vanity, our helplessness, before the Majesty of the Supreme. It was by the thorn in the flesh that St. Paul was saved from being exalted above measure by the multitude of his revelations. It rebukes our forgetfulness of Him, who, although unseen,

is ever present ; and it enforces, by bitter experience, our need of habitual devotion and supplies of celestial grace. It was in the hour of distress that Manasseh sought the Lord his God ; and Jonah, from the depths, looked in penitential sorrow towards his temple, and implored and found mercy.

It disentangles our affections from the false and perilous attachments of the world ; and we feel that there is no substantial happiness that is not connected with devotedness of the heart to the will of Heaven. “ Before I was afflicted, I went astray ; but now have I kept Thy word. It was good for me that I have been afflicted ! ” To those who have experienced the power of religious principle in the varied exercises of human life, all this will appear easy of apprehension ; nor will they hesitate to acknowledge with grateful emotion, that in the school of affliction they have learned the richest lessons of piety. The world has lost its illusory charms,—sin has ceased to delight or deceive by its intoxicating draughts. Driven to the throne

of grace for shelter from "the pitiless storm,"—compelled to look beyond the range of created satisfactions, they have found their refuge in the love of the Redeemer, in divine meditations, in hopes which rest upon what is unseen and eternal. Fellowship with the Father of spirits, and a common interest with the faithful in the blessings of the kingdom of grace ;—these have become their warmest aspirations, and emerging from clouds of tribulation, as the sun in his strength, they have gone on their way rejoicing !

We do not mean to affirm, that there is a necessary tendency in all states of the human mind, to derive benefit from suffering. The speculations of Hartley on that interesting point, appear to be falsified by fact, and at variance with the state of human nature as alienated from God. It has not power in every instance to produce the religious principle, where it does not previously exist. But it supplies a *test*—a touchstone. If there is no sound piety, it will, in many cases, pro-

duce murmurings, and bitterness of spirit, with hard thoughts of God; but true faith will convert it into a blessing, by that living and sacred energy, with which it renders everything tributary to the great ends of our redemption. To a mind bent on the attainment of what is holy and good, afflictions will be hailed as among the "all things" needful, which are conspiring to bring about the great consummation.

II. Support and deliverance will most assuredly be vouchsafed to those who put their trust in God.

He will never dishonour their confidence, but his faithfulness will correspond with the firmness and simplicity of their reliance. This assurance rests on no vague surmises, but on the uniform testimony of the word of truth. It is in perfect agreement with the tenor of the covenant of grace, which assures us, that "He who spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will, with him also, freely give us all things." Redeemed by his precious blood, renewed by his Spirit and his

truth, we shall not be suffered to sink under the pressure of calamity. "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea—though the waters thereof roar, and be troubled—though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof!"

I. The faithful will not be tried beyond the necessity of the case: from all superfluous or overwhelming trouble they will be protected. "Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion." "I will correct thee *in measure*, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished." So that the language of the prophet may be adopted by every believer, in the depths of his affliction. "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy! When I fall, I shall arise! When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me!" There are *extreme* cases, to which this remark is not strictly applicable. The best of men may be afflicted by the most severe of calamities, by such a loss or obscuration of reason, that they may walk in darkness, and see no light. It may

be the result of constitutional malady, of a defective organization, which nothing short of a miraculous interposition could prevent. Such cases we leave to be explained with other "deep things and unsearchable" in the great day!

But in the general order and course of the divine dispensations, the extent of our afflictions is *limited* by certain intelligible principles and final causes. The good Shepherd "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." It is beautifully predicted of the Redeemer, that, "the bruised reed he will not break, the smoking flax he will not quench." The circumstances, the point of time, the degree, the duration of our trials, are all under the same gracious superintendence. The winds and the storm obey him.

" Wide as they sweep their sounding way,
They work thy sovereign will !
And awed by thy majestic voice,
Confusion shall be still !"

Instead, therefore, of suspecting that your

lot is needlessly and rigorously severe, think how much there is that requires correction ! What pride to be humbled ! What selfishness to be overcome ! What discontent to be removed ! What cleaving to the world to be done away ! What reason for calm reflection, for anxious prayer, for self-examination !—“Shew me *wherefore* thou contendest with me !”

2. Grace will be administered in correspondence with the time of need. “God that comforteth those that are cast down”—is a description of the Deity given by Saint Paul. That same distinguished, and most honoured servant of Christ, has recorded a promise, immediately addressed to himself, but designed also for the faithful of all ages—“My grace is sufficient for thee !”

It is not for us to pronounce on *the way* in which spiritual aids are administered in times of tribulation. We are not sufficiently informed of the nature of our own minds, to know through what variety of processes it is accessible by the supreme and infinite mind,

of which we are still more profoundly ignorant. But the fact that spiritual aids *are* given to faith and to prayer, is doubted only by those who hold the Scriptures in light esteem, or whose methods of interpretation would render language of little worth, by destroying all precision of terms and sentences. The grace and strength given to St. Paul, cannot be understood, simply to mean, the mental energy, the moral courage, the spiritual might, to be derived from a firm persuasion of the truth of God's word, or from a reliance on the happy tendency of the ordinary course of Providence. If they mean to express only this, they might have been more accurately worded. On the other hand, supposing the real interposition of God, and an actual influence soothing and invigorating the human soul, what language could be more fit and appropriate, than that in which the promises are clothed? "He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. The Spirit helpeth our infirmities!"—There is no difficulty in supposing that an effect may be

produced by the Divine agency on the natural or physical temperament of the mind, so as to dispose it, under adverse circumstances, to joy, and hope, and innocent hilarity, and cheerful piety!—or, a train of ideas may be suggested by association, and promises of holy writ brought to remembrance, which shall awaken the soul, as by a voice from Heaven, to “gladness and deep joy!” And when you think of the near and tender relation, in which all good men stand to God, there seems nothing at variance with the calmest reason, on the soundest principles of theology, in the persuasion, that those whom God so loves, he will visit with the refreshing influences of his grace. In point of fact, we have the experience of the faithful. They have gone into deep waters, and have not been overwhelmed. The inward state of their minds has presented a sublime contrast to their external condition. The outward man has been doomed to perish, and the inward has been renewed day by day! How delightful, how elevating, this persuasion, that we hold

a spiritual communion with the unseen Spirit of the universe, and are deriving strength in time of need from the great Lord and fountain of all power!—It gives stability to the soul amidst the fluctuations of life. We feel that while the world, with its fashion, passeth away, our feet repose upon the rock of ages. We rise from the depressing consciousness of vanity and nothingness into a holy magnanimity. We feel that our alliance with what is invisible and eternal, is firmer than our connexion with the material world, and that the soul, in union with its Redeemer, and confiding in His grace, is rendered invulnerable to fear and death!—Child of adversity and of sorrow—where is thy faith! Thy God—thy Saviour is ever near! He sees, He loves, He redeems thee! All power in heaven and on earth are His!

3. To the faithful there are given assurances of the complete cessation of all trouble.

In the present state, the removal of one source of disquietude, is but the signal for the arrival of another. It is the lot of our mor-

talities. It is the dispensation under which the whole of our probationary course is to be spent. He that needs no more affliction is already fit for heaven, and will be taken thither. He that is perfectly righteous, will be treated as such, and as evidence of his meetness for a state of undisturbed felicity, will be carried by angels to Abraham's bosom, to join the spirits of just men made perfect. "There the weary are at rest. Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away!"

That we do not derive more consolation from this assurance, is simply, that we do not realize the shortness of human life, which with all its toils and griefs, is hastening to its close;—and, that we do not exercise that faith which we profess to hold, which we think we *do* possess, which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." But we are nearer the end of life and of woe than we imagine—the future is stealthy and rapid in its approach, as the past has been in its flight; the last hour is at hand, and then

we enter on the rest which remaineth for the people of God !

To this topic of consolation we should not do justice, if we regarded the termination of our life of trial, only as the end of a laborious and afflicted course. It is, in reality, the commencement of a nobler existence of eternal beatitude ; and viewed in this higher light, it assumes an aspect not merely soothing, but joyous and transporting. To derive from this consideration its true amount of pleasurable emotion, it is necessary that we habituate our minds to the contemplation, not of the sorrow which we are about to leave, but of the joy that is set before us, since, the most effectual method of expelling from the heart its griefs, is to occupy it with other thoughts, with the beauty and the radiance of celestial imagery, with the anticipated vision of the throne of God, and of the Lamb ! Thus from the gloom of the present, we find a refuge in the brightness of the future, and we pass over death as a momentary point, on which the eye does not rest, while, before it, opens the broad,

immeasurable expanse of glory—honour—immortality !

We would not pretend, with impotent presumption, to describe what eye hath not seen nor ear heard. It is enough to remind the afflicted servants of God, that the future will present an aspect the reverse of whatever is sad and disastrous in the present state. The heart will be at rest. There will be no *personal* disquietudes, for we shall find in our regenerated nature, no longer tainted with sin, no longer the sport of anxious or turbulent passion, the salient spring of inexhaustible satisfactions—the mortal body exchanged for the house not made with hands ; and the incorruptible mind enriched with knowledge and with sanctity, maintaining uninterrupted communion with God. No *relative* griefs,—for the relationships of human life will cease to be ; and the distinctions of husband and wife—of parent and child—of brother and sister will be unknown ; when we shall all be made as the angels of light. No sources of *public* alarm and terror, from the tyranny of

the few, or the more dreadful violence and in-subordination of the multitude ; for the community of the souls of the redeemed, will be happy, supremely happy, when the rude and boisterous passions which agitate cities and empires shall cease to exist, and the chief ambition, the everlasting delight of every member of the great family, will be, to subserve the common interest of all ! No gloomy suspicions of the heart, no spirit of uneasy disbelief, ever resisted, yet maintaining its hold upon the mind, arising from false or imperfect views of the *Divine administration*. For there we shall gain an elevation from whence to behold Him in his beauty, and in his majesty, as the centre of all good, the head of the moral system, the Supreme Intelligence amidst innumerable created minds, who are happy in his favour and graced with his likeness ; while the scheme of man's redemption, now seen but dimly, as the restorative of the broken order of the universe, shall be disclosed to our expanded vision as a manifestation of infinite love ! This, indeed, is the

consummation of the bliss of the redeemed—nearness to God! In that one idea, all happiness is summed up—less will not satisfy an immortal mind—more it cannot possess!—Even now, we can have no true serenity of heart, which does not rest on the deep feeling, the unshaken persuasion, of our being in the hands of the universal Father! All our religious consolations resolve themselves into this. What are the great and precious promises, but as they teach us to rest on God! What is the mediatorial grace of our blessed Redeemer, but as it reclaims us from our wanderings, and brings those who were afar off near to God! What is our confidence in the subordination of the course of Providence to our best interests, but as it assures us that through storm or sunshine, we are on our way to God! What is our conscious delight in following the path of duty, when it demands large sacrifices of feeling, and occasions anxious thoughts and bitter sufferings; but that we are doing the will of God, and approving ourselves to His favour! Think,

then, of the blessedness, when, delivered from the entanglements and perplexities of this house of our pilgrimage, nothing shall intercept our fellowship with infinite goodness, and God shall be all in all !

DISCOURSE III.

ON INWARD AND SPIRITUAL TROUBLES.

PSALM xlii. 5.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul?

WE now advance to a point of deep and solemn interest. We are to contemplate those inward and spiritual troubles of the heart, which originate in fears of the Divine displeasure, or in doubts of our interest in the love of God, and in the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ. The subject is distinct from those already discussed, yet intimately related to them. We shall apply to it the same great principles, as affording the only clue by which to trace the labyrinth in safety,

and to escape difficulties otherwise inextricable. It will afford us unspeakable advantage for the happy prosecution of this great argument, that we carry with us clear apprehensions of the paternal character of God, and of the probationary nature of that moral government, to which he has subjected all mankind ; not excepting the “ called and faithful in Christ Jesus.”

That multitudes are distressed and harassed by such fears, is a fact doubted by none, and testified by the numerous sermons which are preached, and books which are written, for their direction, their solace, their restoration to peace of mind. Not only they who have lived a life of irreligion, and who, being newly awakened to the stings of a guilty conscience, exclaim, in the bitterness of self-condemnation, and of approaching despair, “ What must I do to be saved ?”—but persons who, apparently, have lived in habitual reverence of God, and, at any rate, in the external discharge of the more obvious duties of the Christian life, are not unfrequently subjected

to dark imaginations, to trembling anxieties, complaining that they have no inward sense of the love of God, and fervently longing, with mingled hope and terror, for the liftings up of the light of his countenance. Such appalling imaginations, and anguish of spirit, may, naturally enough, be esteemed of little account by those who have never thought with sufficient seriousness of religion, to be conscious, either of its hopes or its fears. No man can be competent to estimate the pressure of eternal realities upon the human mind, whose own concern has never extended beyond his secular interests. To those, also, who have been educated religiously, and well and intelligently educated, in the principles of the Gospel—who are alive to the paternal character and love of God—and who have been accustomed to follow the dictates of an enlightened conscience, in the honorable discharge of the duties of life—to such, these gloomy exercises of the mind may appear not less unnatural, than they are foreign to the cheerful spirit of Christian hope. They can-

not put themselves in the position of the dark and troubled conscience. They cannot sympathize with that depression or restlessness of the soul, which is inconsistent with a sound and healthful constitution of the mind. They may be disposed, therefore, to view it with more severity than tenderness, as a criminal indulgence of morbid feelings,—as injustice done to the love and mercy of God,—or, as indicating some mystery of iniquity, not openly confessed, and justly tormenting the conscience with anticipations of judgment, and fears of wrath to come! Let it be remembered, however, that the strong are to bear with the infirmities of the weak. We are all frail,—all indigent beings. Our weaknesses vary with character and constitutional temperament; but we are none of us without them, and if a discourse on such a topic may appear superfluous, or distasteful, to those who enjoy, in sweet serenity, “the sunshine of the breast,” let them remember, that to others, of less happy frame of mind, it is of no small account, that they have their mis-

conceptions corrected, their burden removed, their gloomy or fitful feelings calmed, and their perturbed spirit freed from the bondage of imaginative or servile terrors, that they may be led into the glorious liberty of the sons of God !

As in the diseases of the body, so in the maladies of the mind, it is indispensable that their nature and their causes be detected, in order to the application of a successful mode of treatment. Let us, therefore, inquire into the sources of these spiritual distresses. The nature of the evil being ascertained, the remedy and the cure may follow. Perhaps we shall be surprised by the discovery, that in the majority of cases, the simple detection of the sources of our inward disquietudes, will itself operate our release from trouble.

1. A diseased and morbid state of the physical constitution will, in many cases, account for the agitations and terrors of the mind.

However mysterious and undefinable may be the reciprocal influences of mind and matter, we are all conscious of them. A distem-

pered mind will macerate, and eventually destroy the body; and an afflicted body will derange the functions of the mind, so as completely to disqualify it for correct thinking, and serene and happy feelings. Religious disquietudes are often to be traced to this source. An enfeebled or languid system, the result of organic derangement, or of unwise and ill-regulated habits of living, will bewilder, becloud, agitate, destroy the mind. In such instances, the fact of the thoughts being particularly directed to spiritual concerns, arises from the circumstance of the mind's previous tendency to contemplate sacred things. The same physical temperament would certainly have led to mental distress, although of a different kind, had other interests than those of the soul happened to have the ascendancy, and to engross the heart. In such instances, they who come to the ministers of religion for succour, ought rather to have recourse to the skill of the Physician, or to a change of life and habits. Before they sink into hopeless suspicions of themselves,

or of God, let them examine their way of spending the hours of life—whether it be not such as to suppress the buoyancy of the heart, by enervating the health, and to substitute moody fancies, day-dreams of sorrow, for cheerful emotions, and the conscious flow of joyous spirits. Nor let the sad effects of neglected health, of late hours, of improper abstinence from exercise, or from society, be imputed to defect of religious principle, or the withdrawal of the consolatory aids of the Divine Spirit. If the melancholy be traced to a distempered state of the animal functions, it is obvious, that no exhibition of religious truth to the mind,—no views of the Divine character, or of the grace of the Redeemer, can be of any avail, until that source of disquiet has been removed. To an imagination at once excited and uncontrolled, darkened and disturbed by nervous disorder, no spiritual comfort will bring relief. The vision of Paradise would not cheer—the melody of heaven would not soothe. Nor let it be said, that there is no consolation in this

view of the subject. Most assuredly, it is matter of thankfulness, and an omen of hope, that your sadness is not of heavenly origin, the frown of Deity,—but only a passing dream—the hallucination of a distempered brain—the visionary terrors of a valetudinarian.

On the same principle, we interpret the complaints, often feelingly uttered, and with pious sorrow, of incapacity to keep alive the attention during a protracted religious service. The mind wanders,—the spirit flags. It is deplored as a want of spirituality, allied to sin,—as the declension of the soul from the holy fervours of devotion. Perhaps, after all, it is only the necessary result of constitutional debility; and the very sorrow it occasions, is to be regarded as proof that the heart is not alienated from the hallowed sentiments, which give to divine exercises all their value. Far be it from us to apologize for the negligent performance of duties. Indifference of soul, amidst solemn engagements, is deeply to be deplored, and every

way guarded against. But equally far be it from us, to confound infirmity with guilt, through forgetfulness of the natural lassitude which may overtake weakness or disease, even when the heart is right with God! Happy for us, that He who is the object of our worship can penetrate the secrets of our breasts; and as he will never accept the ardour of a heated imagination for the devout homage of the soul, so neither will He reject the offering of sincere and conscientious piety; although unimpassioned, it may be presented as the calm dictate of reason and of principle, in the hour of languid depression. If there be "some good thing in us" towards the Lord our God, He will not judge harshly of the natural infirmities which grieve us; "for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth we are dust!"

II. Another cause, and a most prolific one, of spiritual distress, is the want of sound Scriptural knowledge. Misconceptions of Christian truth must, as a necessary result, lead to perplexity with regard to our own

state. Before any man can cherish a settled hope of acceptance with God, he must know what are the terms of reconciliation; since, while ignorant of these terms, he cannot know whether or not he has complied with them.

There are some, perhaps, who are held in chains of fear and dread, through inadequate conceptions of the mercy of God, His compassion for his wandering children. They have not obtained ideas sufficiently large and generous of the mediation of Christ, as the Redeemer and Intercessor of His Church. They have yet to learn, that the promises and invitations of the Gospel are so comprehensive, as to hold out a warrant to ALL the children of men, who are conscious of guilt and misery, to throw themselves, as penitents, into the arms of Infinite Love! Hence, instead of coming as suppliants for mercy, and with the confidence of children, in virtue of the mediatorial office of the Redeemer, they are looking for a sinless perfection in themselves, which they will never find, as an essen-

tial pre-requisite. And, looking in vain for that stainless purity, they are oppressed with anxieties and consternation,—they tremble, lest, even in their repentance, or their faith, there should be defects inexcusable by the Divine righteousness.

Yet is this error indicative of something noble and lofty in their moral conceptions of God. And although it is an error, and to themselves a painful one, I could never join with those who set it down for condemnation, as a spirit of Pharisaic self-righteousness, criminally indisposed towards the method of justification proposed in the Gospel. It betrays confused or imperfect notions of the ground of access to God. That is all. But it is as remote from the self-righteousness denounced in the Bible, as is the light of heaven from the midnight of the grave. Nor can we suppose, that God will ever reject those whose fears originate in the sublimest views of His moral purity, coupled with imperfect conceptions of the way in which He dispenses His riches of grace. Such persons

have in them the elements of all that is great and holy in the Christian character. The seal of heaven is impressed on them. They give stronger demonstrations of a true piety, than many whose views are less obscure, or who profess a more simple reliance. All they want is a more enlarged knowledge of the way of redemption. They are already in a state of grace, though they know it not; being destitute, not of the disposition to believe, but simply of a full acquaintance with the objects of faith,—a most important distinction! Want of accurate views of truth, even of truth relating to the Saviour, will never condemn any, whose hearts are substantially right with God, nor will clear views alone bring any man to heaven. Yet how common is the error of the present day, of taking directly the opposite ground! None are supposed to be in a state of safety, as the accepted children of God, but those who have arrived at such views of the redemption of Christ, as lead to a simple reliance on the all-sufficiency of His work. *That* they make

the line of distinction between the lost and the saved. As if it were nothing to have an honest, though partially enlightened conscience!—nothing, to have solemn impressions of the moral grandeur of the Deity, and earnest aspirations of the soul after conformity to His will! I believe that such persons are not only “not far from the kingdom,” but actually numbered with those whose citizenship is in heaven. Cornelius was in a state of grace before he was instructed in *the way* of salvation. While others would aggravate the distresses under which such persons labour, by telling them, that all their trust and reverence are worse than nothing, so long as they remain ignorant of the fullness of Christ,—I would remind them, for their relief, that God regards such feelings, not with indignation, but with complacency,—not more with pity, than with approbation! They are the spontaneous homage of the soul to His purity, His sanctity, and to that eternal morality upon which the entire structure of His dominion rests. At the same time,

let them be assured, that the Gospel reveals a system of grace and of mediation, precisely adapted to meet their fears, without lessening their reverence of the Divine purity,—a way of access for guilty man to the presence of his Maker,—a Redeemer all-sufficient; and that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will never reject the tears of the suppliant, nor turn away with disdain from the sacrifice of a broken heart. “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost!”

But, I apprehend that the more usual error productive of spiritual distress is that of supposing that an *absolute assurance* of the love of God is necessary to an interest in that love; and, that a vivid and delightful experience of the joys of faith, bidding defiance to doubts and fears, is inseparable from true religion. You are taught, perhaps, that a persuasion of *your own* interest in the Redeemer is an essential accompaniment to your saving belief of His grace, His majesty, His power to redeem. But destitute of that

consciousness of infallible safety, and able to arrive only at an humble *hope* that you have complied with the sacred injunctions to repent, to believe, and to walk humbly with God in the conscientious discharge of the duties of life, you tremble, lest the witness of the Spirit be withholden, to signify that you are not a child of God, nor an heir of the promises!—In short, you are in bitterness of spirit, because you have not *that* which it is *not necessary* you should have,—that which cannot be an object of Christian faith, since it forms no part of the Divine testimony,—that which is not made the matter of direct promise,—that to which but few good men, and under most propitious circumstances, ever arrive,—that which, if bestowed indiscriminately on all believers, would be irreconcilable with a state of *probation*, and supersede by anticipation the decisions of the day of judgment;—that, in a word, which is more frequently attained by men of sanguine temperament and ignorant presumption, and who, after all, may be given

over to believe a lie, than by the best, the most conscientious, the most spiritual, the most honourable, and holy of men! The humble hope of the truly conscientious man, who is "working out his own salvation with fear and trembling," and "giving all diligence to make his calling and election sure," is of more real worth than the strongest inward assurance, which rests on no moral evidence, and is only the persuasion of a sanguine or imaginative mind.

Of the first, it may be said, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall, doubtless, come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Of the other, it may be as truly pronounced, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death!" Of the utter worthlessness of that assurance which never knows a doubt, and which, by a miserable perversion of terms, calls presumption faith, we have abundant evidence. It is remarkable, that they who profess to have it, are generally persons of whom others stand

in doubt, just in proportion to their own self-complacency. It is still more remarkable, that, greatly as they would appear satisfied with their state, their confidence is unreal; nor is there any class of persons subject to more frequent endurance of morbid anxiety, and gloomy terror. It is easily explained. They have embraced a false notion of religion, which they cherish, because it flatters their self-love; and, under pretence of doing honor to the sovereignty of grace, feeds a subtle pride. They cherish it, because it presents an easy way of settling their account with conscience, and with God, substituting a ready assurance for a life of self-denial, and self-control. They cherish it, for, in general, they have no other pretension by which to satisfy themselves, or secure inward peace. They cherish it—but it is a viper which wounds the heart to which it is pressed! It is not in human nature to be for ever the dupe of a presumption so absurd, and so groundless—so foreign to the dictates of the understanding, the impressions of natural conscience, and

the moral constitution of the human mind. It fails, therefore, to do what it promises. It puts the mind into a forced and unnatural position, which cannot be maintained. It is not the true witness of the Spirit, and it leaves the heart open to all the doubts and misgivings, which a spurious theology has no power to repel. Such persons are often seen pitiable victims of their own most fatal delusion—angry, even to bitterness and scorn, with those who do not fall in with their views of faith and assurance, yet chiefly angry, because opposition from without disturbs their self-complacency; by the support which it derives from *within*, from the deep convictions of nature—from the voice of God addressing them in the inexpressible accents of conscience, and of truth. There can be no stability in an assurance, which rests only on a false view of religion, on an inward impulse, on an undefinable persuasion; and they are often, of all men, most miserable!

Unlike anecdotes in the pulpit; but, as was once on a plain, practical, and important

topic, I would mention a case which fell under my own observation, and which afforded a painful illustration of the emptiness of that assurance, which is sometimes substituted for faith. It was that of a young man, of powerful intellect, and of sanguine temperament, who, from a life of careless impiety, was brought to reflection. His conscience was alarmed. He was concerned, to obtain a knowledge of the way of salvation. Unhappily, he soon fell into the hands of persons, who attempted to soothe his troubled mind, by administering to him the doctrines of this dangerous theology. He had only to believe that Christ died for him in particular, and he was safe. His ardent mind speedily came to that conclusion. He was absolutely certain that he was of the elect. He had no more doubt of his interest in God, than of his existence. A faith thus prematurely established, was, with equal rapidity, destroyed. He lost his assurance, denied the faith, proclaimed himself an infidel! This was the man who had no more doubt of his salvation than of

his existence. I am ignorant of his subsequent history. His ingenuous and open character induces the hope, that he may have lived to embrace more scriptural sentiments, and a more honorable course. If not, he is only one of multitudes who have fallen victims to this system, which, under pretence of imparting peace, administers a moral poison to the heart.

Allow me, therefore, to suggest to those who lament their want of such confidence, that they are only destitute of that which forms no essential part of Christianity. The test of piety is to be found in character. Holiness, guided and sustained by faith, is everything—the faith which purifieth the heart. And a life of habitual piety, directed by just views of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, will, eventually, secure that which cannot, in any other way, be attained—“the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.”

The remedy for the miseries and perturbations which originate in false views of religion, is sound and practical knowledge of the truth.

This is the joy and gladness of the heart. The Christian is beautifully described as "the new man, which is renewed in *knowledge* after the image of Him that created him." The inspired writers urge, as of pre-eminent importance, the "*abounding* in knowledge." The point is pressed by them, in every form of emphatic language, that Christians should "*increase*" in knowledge, and be "*filled*" with knowledge. As it is the victorious antagonist power, which alone can suppress, in connection with good feeling, the follies, the scandals, the popular delusions, which, in every age, have infested the Church of God, and exposed religion to contempt,—so it is the great antidote for the distresses of the heart. While we walk in the dark, we fancy strange noises, and fearful sights. The imagination riots amid scenes of its own creation, and the heart may be assailed by delusive terrors, or abandoned to ideal transports. Is it no consolation to the trembling spirit of the penitent to be told, that his fears of rejection are the perturbations and agitations of a dream, and

that the orient beams of the morning will dispel every phantom of alarm?

Get, then, large and scriptural views of God, as he is revealed in Christ, the tender, lovely Father of His confiding children. Form your religious faith on a fearless study of the Bible, interpreted by a constant reference to the character of God, and the moral constitution of human nature; and let not your faith be adulterated with the nostrums of an empirical theology: and you will find, that as the mind enlarges to receive "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ," a divine repose will pervade your spirits—imaginary terrors will subside—you will be braced up to endure, with fortitude, the real evils of life—and your path will be that of the just; shining more and more unto the perfect day!

III. There is another cause of spiritual distress, and that by no means uncommon, which rather calls for censure and admonition, than for the consolations of religion.

There are persons, who are not altogether

ignorant of the great principles of the Christian faith,—who, perhaps, regard themselves as more than ordinarily well skilled in the knowledge of the truth,—but who are subject, notwithstanding, to seasons of great darkness, and are heard lamenting the days of past repose and satisfaction, when they walked in light, with the candle of the Lord shining around them. What is the reason of this change? Simply this. They are not living in habits of self-government. They are not under the controul of a fine and delicate sense of moral obligation. Consciously, or unconsciously, they have a tinge of practical antinomianism influencing their conduct. You may often observe, in those whose doctrinal views are carried to an extreme, with regard to the moral impotence of man, and whose corresponding notions of the sovereignty of grace amount to a system of pure fatalism, a want of high moral principle. They do not, in theory, reject the obligations of virtue, but their peculiar views of the Christian theology, gradually and insensibly enervate, without

destroying, the moral sense. They hold principles which betray them into sin, and yet they have enough remaining of natural conscience—the moral sense—the deep-seated, and indestructible faculty of discerning between good and evil,—to condemn their aberrations from the path of rectitude. That sinful human nature, which they hold to be so utterly depraved as to be disqualified, in every sense, for subjection to the moral government of God,—that sinful human nature is not, after all, so blind, so merged in guilt, so lost to moral sensibility, as to allow them to sin with impunity. Conscience speaks ; and with a voice that must be heard, and cannot be silenced. They have recourse to all the flattering expedients which promise the hope of relief. They speak of the infinite and sovereign grace of God. They attempt to take refuge in the atonement and righteousness of Christ. They seek an apology in the helplessness, and extreme depravity of man ; throwing the blame from themselves on their Creator. But all in vain : a voice is

heard;—it pierces their hearts—announcing that Christ is not the minister of sin—that God tempteth no man—that the essence of religion consists in holding faith, and a good conscience,—and that the righteous Lord loveth righteousness! No spurious views of Christian doctrine will totally becloud the mind to the holiness of God, as the moral Governor of the rational creation. No sophistical argument can implant the conviction, that, for the sake of Christ, or for any other possible consideration, He, who is the great centre and fountain of purity, can regard, without abhorrence, an habitual and wilful transgression of the laws of truth, of sanctity, of virtue, of honour. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked! Here, then, the cause of the disquietude is sufficiently obvious; and as no spurious emollients will avail to heal the smart of self-inflicted wounds, it is of the utmost consequence that deceitful palliatives should be rejected. These salutary admonitions of conscience, intended to obviate the effects of extreme and dan-

gerous doctrines, are sometimes profanely, or, we would rather say, ignorantly, called the sovereign hidings of God's countenance. And the conscious alienation of the heart from the pure integrity of religious principle, is supposed to be no more than the temporary withdrawal of the manifestations of Divine grace, to try the faith of the troubled believer. This is proposed, by way of consolation. Believe that God loves you, even when you have no sense of that love—when you are offending against His moral rectitude—and He will soon return, in all the plenitude of His grace, and wipe off your tears. Monstrous extravagance! As if the great Spirit of the universe would thus, as in pastime, amuse himself with our false alarms;—as if He, who loves only what is good, and who never fails to do so, would withhold his hallowed influences of joy and of peace from the heart of the upright, without just cause of offence! Lay not this flattering unction to the heart. This is a case of delusion, and of peril. It first calls for admonition. Comfort is out of the question.

True ; of the love, the tenderness, the faithfulness of God, too much cannot be said. It is an inexhaustible theme. It towers beyond the pathos and sublimity of all human eloquence. The consolations of Christianity have a sweetness and a power corresponding with the fountain of eternal goodness from which they flow. But they do not apply to such a case as this. Christian consolations are for the disciples of Christ ; and no man can claim that character, who is transgressing against the first and fundamental principles of all religion—reverence of conscience, and conformity to the demands of the law of God. Yet even this is not a case for despair. The Gospel holds out the olive branch of peace to all transgressors, who repent of the evil they have done. The inward conflicts which such persons experience, prove that they are not yet abandoned to a totally impenitent heart. Let them, therefore, come, as if they had never come before, suppliants to the throne of heavenly grace,—with the same godly sorrow, the same profound humiliation,

as if, for the first time, they now repented of the error of their ways, and turned to keep the testimonies of the Lord. Rather, perhaps, with more bitter sorrow, for having perverted and abused the truth. In the Lord Jesus Christ they will find an intercessor; in God, a reconciled Father; in the Holy Spirit, a Comforter. Go; sin no more; lest a worse thing happen unto thee!

We have enumerated, as causes of spiritual distress, three principal evils:—a diseased and morbid state of the physical constitution, affecting the mind by sympathy; ignorance, or misconception of Scripture truth, and the nature of acceptable piety; and allowed departures from moral righteousness, inconsistent with faith and a sound conscience.

It will be obvious to reflecting minds, that these causes may operate either separately or in conjunction, and that their *joint* effects must be more aggravated than when they act singly and apart. On a distempered and melancholy mind, the subject of dreary imaginations, prone to put an adverse construc-

tion on every thing that bears upon its final interests, false views of the Divine administration must have a more fatal influence, and impress with a more deadly terror.

If none, who have listened to these practical advices, are in circumstances to need them, an important point will nevertheless have been gained, if, by the sentiments now suggested, they should be saved from falling into distresses, to which, for want of just views, they may hereafter be exposed.

The general conclusion is, that the great antidotes to the gloomy and anxious terrors of the soul are—knowledge of the way of salvation, combined with sincere piety; sound, high-toned, practical piety—beautifully represented as walking with God!—an habitual sentiment of religious trust; a calm and resolute pursuit of the path of duty, regardless of all minor considerations, and superior to the smiles or the frowns of men; the culture of an enlightened and scrupulous conscience, delicately alive to every stain of folly or of sin; love to the Saviour, and imitation of

His example, as the great model of every embodied excellence ; and, finally, a life of devotion and of benevolence, enforced by deep impressions of moral responsibility, and of eternal judgment. *These*, will secure the mind from self-condemnation—these will qualify you to look up to God always, and to say—Abba ! Father ! Nor will you fail to realize by faith the happy termination of this mortal conflict, when the soul shall ascend to regions from which guilt and sorrow are excluded by the beatific vision of God !

DISCOURSE IV.

THE TENDENCY OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH TO
PRODUCE AN HABITUAL ELEVATION OF MIND
AND JOYOUSNESS OF HEART.

PHIL. iv. 4.

Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, Rejoice.

THAT none of the children of men should have expressed a deeper feeling of the evils and sufferings of human life than the first preachers of Christianity, is not matter of surprise, for none have had a more severe experience of its trials. Not that they were in haste to complain. St. Paul was not a man to thrust himself, uncalled for, on the attention of others. He had too much of manly modesty, and of real dignity of senti-

ment, to obtrude either his labours or his sufferings into notice, for the sake of extorting compassion or applause. But statements, which he would not otherwise have made, were forced from him by the calumnies of his enemies ; and in self-defence he is compelled to contrast his own claims to respect with those of his adversaries. " Are they ministers of Christ ? (I speak as a fool,) I am more ; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes save one ; thrice was I beaten with rods ; once was I stoned ; thrice I suffered shipwreck ; a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils of the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things which are

without, that which cometh on me daily, the care of all the Churches !”

Here we discover no want of keen and sensitive feeling, no vulgar apathy of the soul rendered callous, by false principles, or by long endurance, to the buffetings and sorrows of life. The Apostles were men of like passions with others. They wept like other men, their hearts throbbed, and their pulses quickened, and they knew both the transports of joy and the agonies of a wounded spirit. All the finest, noblest, most humane of our sensibilities lived in the breasts of those heroic and all-enduring men. Yet, with minds of peculiar susceptibility, they did not sink under the pressure of their calamities. They were “troubled on every side, yet not distressed—persecuted, yet not in despair.” They were happy, often they were joyous, and there were moments of more than ordinary elevation, when they felt the glow and the swell of triumph burst in upon their hearts, bright anticipations of the great victory that awaited them, when the

last conflict should be over and mortality swallowed up of life! Holy men of God! your labours are done, your sorrows are ended: the crown that was prepared for you beams upon the brow of the glorified saint! The martyr who suffered for Christ, now reigns with his Lord, in the majesty of the mediatorial kingdom! But being dead, they yet speak. Their sufferings, their magnanimity, their serene and hallowed joys, their faith which overcame the world, all are recorded for our admonition; and from their examples of calm or triumphant piety, we draw living inspirations of courage and of hope. Be ye followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises!

One inference, at least, is suggested by their experience. It is this. The troubles of life are not inconsistent with a mind reposing with habitual and tranquil confidence on God. Nor to "the called and faithful in Christ Jesus" are its afflictions such, as of necessity, to exclude the most exalted emotions of the soul, basking, as it were, in the bright beams

of the summer sun, or bathing in the deep transparent waters of a sea of bliss, even while the clouds are seen to gather, and there is heard the murmur of the coming storm. The principles of Christianity, it is plain from the example of these servants of Christ, provide not only an antidote to fear, but open to the souls of the faithful sources of pure and ennobling satisfaction. And since these principles are the same throughout all ages, resting upon *facts* equally interesting to every member of the Church of God down to the end of time, there is no assignable reason why they should not produce the same happy effects, *if* there be the same faith in exercise to realize and appropriate their consolation.

I do not mean to confound the apostolic age with subsequent periods. That the men of that age had peculiar and miraculous aids cannot be denied. The circumstances in which they stood can never be repeated under any combination of events. They had beheld strange and wonderful things. They had held actual converse with the Son of God. The

personal ministry of Christ was within their immediate recollection. His death, his resurrection, the awakening scenes of the day of Pentecost, all were of recent occurrence. They were themselves chief agents in a magnificent economy of grace and power, armed with supernatural influence, and in direct communication with the invisible world. Their ministry was opposed only to render more illustrious its superhuman grandeur. It was mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. All this they felt; and it is not possible but that a correspondent excitement should follow. It could not but lift them above the depressing tameness of ordinary life. But it was not simply excitement that gave energy and spirit to their minds amid toils and endurance. St. Paul, particularly, has disclosed to us the secret of that fine and lofty enthusiasm which bore down grief and sorrow, and sustained them in deep waters. It was their faith, their hope, their habitual impression of the reality and the nearness of the invisible world, the conscious

persuasion that they were acting for God, that God was with them of a truth, that the Christian redemption was a scheme of immeasurable grace, involving the destinies of man for ever, and that to the faithful servants of Christ, the future glory was secure beyond the possibility of failure. *This* it was that filled them with joy unspeakable and full of glory—not so much that spirits were made subject to them, as that their names were written in heaven!

And this, after all, now, as then, must be the chief antidote to the depressing influence, the gloomy agitations of human life, as a state of suffering.

We have made an acquisition of immense value, when we are in possession of *principles* to which, in the hour of distress, we can have recourse, and on which we can rest our confidence. But we are happier still, when these principles are incorporated with the frame and texture of our minds, so that our belief of their truth operates with habitual energy and as a living power. It is then, that we

ascend into a higher stage, a nobler sphere of intellectual and moral existence. We leave far beneath us the clouds and mists which bewilder our path and mislead us into perils and alarms, when we attain to that tranquil and holy *faith*, which reposes upon God in the persuasion that He loves us, and which, by its power to bring home to the heart vivid impressions of the future, becomes "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things unseen!" Thus it was with the primitive saints and martyrs and apostles. They escaped innumerable disquietudes simply by living above them. Circumstances which would have produced fretful agitation, or dark surmise, or fearful imaginations, or appalling gloom, under another state of mind, were not felt, not regarded, or passed by as comparative trifles, only because their minds were pre-occupied by thoughts too great, too lofty, too inspiring to leave room for the little perplexities of human life—"these light afflictions which are but for a moment."—Their religion was an universal

element mingling with all the thoughts and feelings and habits of their minds, and not a form to be used or laid aside at pleasure. They did not embrace a few cold and speculative dogmas, confounding metaphysical reasoning with moral truth, and thus making the articles of their creed a substitute for the regenerated soul—an opiate for the conscience—a mere incentive to delusive confidence or spiritual pride; while malignant tempers remained unsubdued, and no real provision was made for the joy and exultation of the heart. No, their piety was fed by ennobling views of God. They received the grace of Christ in a thankful soul, their religion was enthroned within. It was spiritual, practical, expansive, realizing the beautiful and expressive imagery of the Redeemer, when he spoke of a true faith as a well of water, a salient fountain, within the deep recesses of the soul, springing up unto eternal life!—Consolation is not the term to be used. This state of mind is itself *happiness*. It will supersede the necessity of recurring again

and again to first principles, or particular topics of soothing and elevating influence, by placing us beyond the reach of a thousand anxious cares. This was what they meant, when they spoke of “Christ *in you*, the hope of glory”—of believers being “temples of the Holy Ghost”—and of “God dwelling in the heart.”—And they supposed the attainment of such a state of mind possible, when they exhorted the faithful ever to rejoice in the Lord!

It is of no moment for us to determine, what perhaps cannot be determined, whether, “by the Lord,” the sacred writer intended the Lord JESUS CHRIST; or, whether he meant generally what the Psalmist beautifully calls *delighting* in God. It amounts to the same thing. If we rejoice in the Redeemer, it is because he is the brightness of the Father’s glory—a gracious and consolatory revelation of Deity—a manifestation in the flesh of the majesty and love of the invisible God!—If we delight in God, it is as thus made known to us in the person and offices of His

only Son. Christianity is the revelation of God in Christ, "reconciling the world unto himself,"—and to rejoice in the Lord, is to realize by sweet experience the spiritual delight, the conscious happiness, imparted to the devout soul by the truths of the Gospel. The design of this discourse is to illustrate this point.

1. The sincere Christian is conscious of effects produced on himself, his mind, his heart, his impressions of moral and spiritual truth, and his entire frame and constitution of character, which are a source of inward joy and peace.

While destitute of the knowledge and the love of God, men are said to be "dead in trespasses and sins." They are "ignorant of the way of peace." The things of God are "foolishness unto them." Their pursuits are exclusively secular; their pleasures are only sensual, or if intellectual, they spring only from the contemplation and knowledge of natural objects of the material universe, viewed apart from religious truth. God is

not in all their thoughts. In this state of alienation from the great Spirit, the life and glory of the universe, there can be no true happiness, as there is no moral dignity. The intellect is beclouded with false ideas of truth, the heart seduced from its allegiance, all the faculties which grace our nature perverted, deranged, the action of the mind tending to its own misery and destruction. But the original constitution of human nature fits it to commune with eternal truth. It has capabilities of illimitable growth and expansion in moral power. Its true elements are knowledge and piety, the objects of which are without bounds. Conscious of its native grandeur, its secret aspirations are ever towards the great and infinite. The Gospel corresponds with the wants of our spiritual nature. It reveals God. Suited to our actual condition, meeting our necessities, applying itself to all the better principles which corruption has not extinguished,—it enters the soul with an awakening and quickening energy. There it reigns, and puts forth

the power of supreme dominion. It not merely discloses the evidences and proofs of the glorious constitution of human nature, its dignity as a temple for the habitation of God through the Spirit, its capacity of ceaseless progression and everlasting duration,—but it comes with a regenerating influence which fits the believer for the destiny which it unfolds. It tells us that we are immortal, and it prepares us for immortality. God our Father! Christ our Intercessor! The Spirit our Comforter! Angels of light our protectors, ministering to the heirs of salvation! Life a pilgrimage! Heaven the land of promise, and final resting-place of the spirits of the redeemed! Such is Christianity! Thus, by awakening the intellect from dreamy slumbers, and directing its contemplations to things spiritual and invisible,—by presenting to the affections all that is lovely in the Divine character, by making the soul familiar with the thought and persuasion of its own immense and indestructible powers of thought, of feeling, and of never-ending duration;—it

not only deepens and vivifies the consciousness of existence, but it imparts to that consciousness a joyous and elevated character. The inward soul is filled with emotions of serene but lofty satisfaction, as the prospect before it brightens and widens; and the Christian only can enter into the deep meaning of that sentiment—"I am a man, redeemed, immortal. I am the child of the Eternal Father. I am going to the beatific Vision. I spring from the dust—but my home is the bosom of God!"

I am now speaking of the genuine influence of Christianity, when it is seated in the dominion of the soul, as a spiritual religion, and is allowed to exercise over the understanding and the heart, its own renovating influence. I do not mean to affirm, that amongst all the various forms of Christian profession, this most happy result is in every instance visible. The minds of individuals are variously constituted. They differ in their original construction; they are modified by circumstances, by education, by discipline, by

association with other minds, whose bias they receive, and by the infinite varieties of human life. And truth, in a world like ours, can never be seen but as partaking of the beauty or deformity of the mind through which it has passed, and whose peculiarities of weakness or energy give a character to its manifestation. But in its own nature it is immutable. Its own tendencies are always to goodness and happiness. Let it obtain an ascendancy over the soul into which the unadulterated word has been admitted by a living faith—let it reign with supreme controul, subordinating every faculty to the grace and dominion of Christ—and it will be found to lead, first to *hope*, then to *peace*, and finally to *joy*, unspeakable and full of glory.

Nor is this incongruous with Christian humility, with the profoundest feelings of contrition, with that spirit of self-renunciation, which imparts to every other grace of the spirit its most lovely aspect. The light which reveals the High and Holy One, discloses to the Christian his own weakness, and

all the humiliating accompaniments of infirmity and guilt. He sees what obstacles are to be surmounted before the mind can attain to that purity which constitutes the glory and blessedness of the souls of the redeemed. But his penitential sorrows are attended by hope. He learns that he may contend with temptation in the assurance of victory, through the promised grace of heaven. He is thrown amongst foes, that he may fight his way through them, and he is taught to believe that the honours of conquest will be at last heightened by the moral energy, the spiritual might which have been called forth and perfected by the awful conflict. He hears perpetually, for his support, that inspiring voice of admonition and of promise: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life!"

Think of this state of mind, imagine it in its higher exercises—and you will not fail to perceive, that with a lively faith, accompanied with the inward consciousness of daily and hourly training up for a still happier state of

nearness to God, there must be a joy of the heart, calm, rational, and imperturbable ; which can smile in tribulation, and meet with the same complacent firmness, trials yet to come, as we can remember the past which are gone for ever !

II. The scheme of redemption, with its various provisions for raising the faithful to the fruition of eternal life, cannot but yield sacred delight to the mind of a sincere believer.

As the system of God's moral government and of man's probationary course, including the economy of grace, is not the discovery of natural reason, but matter of Divine Revelation ; so the means for bringing about the great results of that system, are of a kind peculiar to itself, and only to be learned from the Word of Life. The facts by which it is distinguished are miraculous. They supply the most cogent motives to a life of piety, by appealing to all that is ignoble in fear and all that is generous in hope. They prove the interposition of Deity. They are such as

to fill the mind with an amazement of joy, the whole soul with sentiments of rapt and holy adoration.

It comes from Him who knows what is in man, and is adapted, with manifest design, in its more conspicuous features, to meet the conscious guilt of the sinner, to vanquish incredulity, and allay the trembling suspicions of the human breast. The channel through which mercy is conveyed bespeaks, not less than the gift itself, the grace of its mighty author. If the promise of glory and immortality were nakedly held forth to the sinful world, on the mass of ignoble minds it might have produced no salutary effects—it is therefore accompanied by *facts* which awaken the most obdurate hearts to feeling; and convert gloomy desperation into gladness. Or, it might have been deemed by multitudes, too great for our meanness, too good for our demerit. We should have been dazzled by the blaze of its brightness, confounded by its immeasurable extent. Even our *faith* labours under the magnitude of the grace. Man that

is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble! Man! that has broken his Maker's law, and forfeited His love! Man! regenerated, redeemed, saved from wrath, and numbered with the sinless spirits who minister to the Eternal! Where is the evidence on which to rest a hope so blessed—to indulge a prospect so delightful, that all the scenery of human life in its most beautiful or majestic forms, fades before it and suffers an eclipse! These fears, quite natural to man, under the circumstances of perplexity and confusion produced by sin—these fears are anticipated! To put the heart to rest, to give to us an unanswerable proof of his gracious designs—"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believeth on Him, might not perish, but have eternal life." Here is a *fact*, on which to repose our utmost confidence. The gift of Him who was beloved of the Father, is a pledge of the fulfilment of the Divine promises, which are sealed with His precious blood. "Shall He not *with Him* also, freely give us *all things*?"

And when the fact is developed, when we contemplate the several views given in the New Testament of the Divine perfections and redeeming power of the Son of God, we cannot but feel at each step of our progress, that our faith assumes a more resolute tone, that our hopes tower above all the attacks of fear and distrust; that the longer we gaze on this great sight our amazement is the deeper and our reliance the more simple, till we utter the full flow of awakened feeling in the words supplied us by the Spirit of Inspiration—"I know in whom I have believed—and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed unto Him, unto that day!"

As there is no topic more copiously treated in the New Testament, than the majesty and the grace of Christ in his mediatorial character; as his mission, his sacrifice, his ascension, and his official appointment as Head over all things to the Church, are earnestly insisted on as illustrations of God's infinite love, so I apprehend, there is no method more effective,

for keeping the heart in a state of deep repose, or for kindling joy and gladness amid the depressing trials of life, than with faith and affection to be habitually “looking unto Jesus.” To feel the strong persuasion that *our* interests are identified with His—that if He died for us once, He lives for us now—that He sympathizes with our griefs, so far as heaven can sympathize with earth—that, in His present exaltation, He is employed on our behalf; and, as the forerunner of the faithful, waits to introduce us to the celestial Paradise and the Supreme presence—to feel assured, that “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with Him in glory;” this is the nearest approach we can now enjoy to the more perfect felicity of the redeemed in heaven.

All that the Scriptures reveal of the Saviour, and it is only a *part*,—for “none knoweth the Son but the Father”—all that they reveal is rich in consolation for the child of sorrow, who seeks to strengthen his trust in God. So exalted His majesty—so gentle

His love—so profound His interest in the redemption of man—so indubitable his willingness and ability to save! And, could we but realize the great futurities that relate to His second advent—could we now behold His glory as in that day when He shall raise the dead!—But, ah, it must not, cannot be!—It would not comport with the design of the present dispensation. It would unfit us to live any longer amid the sombre shades of this probationary state. It would engross and fix our imaginations; and the premature vision of the celestial state would cause the suspension, or extinction, of our mortal faculties—rapture and death!

III. Christianity is productive of a calm and elevated tone of feeling, often approaching to holy joy, since it realizes to the mind the excellence of the divine character, and opens the heart to the most delightful sense of the divine goodness.

Religion is beautifully called, walking with God—and, setting the Lord always before us. It consists, not in any abstract notions

of the Deity, which amount only to philosophical speculations—but in a devout persuasion, an inward consciousness of the divine presence ever with us—and a filial reliance of the soul on His paternal love and grace—the practical surrender of our entire selves to the obedience of faith. We love Him because He first loved us! We could not love God, if we cherished mistrust of His benevolent regards towards ourselves, towards the human family. We could not be happy while not fully assured in this vital point. It is the excellence of an intelligent faith in Christ, that it removes every doubt on this great question, and thus lays the foundation of a settled peace—the peace of God which passeth all understanding.

I mention this last, because, as religion begins with God, so it ends and is consummated in Him! The essence of personal piety consists in having God enthroned in the soul, as the object of its profound veneration, and the source of its supreme happiness. The entire system of things, of which we form a

part, is designed to produce this result—to form and perfect within us the love of God, as a moral sentiment, and to teach us that our happiness is derived from His all-sufficiency. What is the design of the material universe, with its boundless profusion of loveliness and grandeur, but to lead us to the Invisible Power and Godhead, from whom all these emanations of beauty and glory proceed, and who is ever replenishing the decay of nature from His own inexhaustible fulness! What is the Christian redemption, but the spiritual deliverance of the soul from the base, the degrading, the miserable thralldom of sin and guilt, that it may be set at liberty to devote all its faculties, its affections, its passions, with cheerful surrender to God!—What constitutes the excellent glory of the Redeemer in the offices He sustains, but that He is the brightness of the Father's glory, revealing to us in His person and word the moral perfections of Deity, and thus rendering the divine character lovely to our views! Why is He the *way*, the truth, the life—but

that He conducts us to the knowledge, and puts us in possession of the favour of the Eternal, to whom we have access through His atonement and intercession!—"But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh, by the blood of Christ."

Again. I mention this last, because it seems to be forgotten by many persons, who value and love the Gospel to a certain extent, that it is the design of the Christian redemption, not simply to effect our deliverance from the penal consequences of sin—not simply to pacify the conscience and dispel fear—not simply to bring us to the foot of the cross, there to remove the burden of guilt—but that we may advance farther and rise higher, that we may attain to eminent degrees of moral goodness, that we may soar upon a lighter and a firmer wing to the regions of praise and adoration, to mingle in the song of joy before the throne of the Eternal. The flesh—the crucified humanity of our Lord—is only the new and living *way*, which opens an entrance within the veil, and brings us to

the Divine presence. Let us not rest in the portal, but enter the temple and approach to the Holy of Holies! Many forget this, or are ignorant of it. They contemplate the Christian sacrifice and redemption as the *end*, instead of regarding it as the *means* simply of their complete and final emancipation. Or rather they are not aware that their spirits, now freed from condemnation, are to seek beyond the deliverance from sin and death, an introduction to the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Hence they lose the pleasures of a more mature piety, by failing to aspire after the higher branches of moral excellence. They remain as penitents at the foot of the cross. They believe in Christ, and they rest in simple faith. They speak of the grace and loveliness of the Saviour, and pray for richer discoveries of His suitableness and all-sufficiency. Happy they, who proceed so far in the knowledge and love of the truth! But happier they, who by faith in the crucified humanity of our Lord, ascend, as by a mystic ladder, to the contemplation and imitation

of the Eternal, to the love of God as the supreme and infinite good! Our knowledge of the way of acceptance, our faith in the Crucified, are but preparatory to more comprehensive views of the Deity, and to our nearer communion with Him, as all in all! And our happiness will be proportioned to the progress we make in this approach to the Infinite Intelligence—the fountain of eternal joy.

These views are borne out by the intimations and glimpses given in the Scriptures in relation to the future state of the redeemed. That Christianity with all its mysteries, its wonders, its miracles of grace and power, is but a temporary dispensation to be succeeded by a yet more complete economy—a means to an end still more majestic and stupendous than itself—is apparent, from a very remarkable, but neglected, passage of Scripture. The *mediatorial* kingdom is to cease, *as such*, with the extinction of sin and death. “Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the

Father;—when He shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him,—that GOD may be ALL in ALL !”

Him first—Him last—Him midst—Him without end !

Retaining his personal glories, and ever to have the reverend love of the redeemed—the Saviour will divest himself of the functions peculiar to the economy of which He is now the head. The prophetic, the priestly, the regal offices will be no more. We shall have immediate access, without a mediator—our homage will be presented to the Universal Father—and God will be All in All !—

Every thing in Scripture accords with the simplicity and sublimity of this conception. Our piety, our happiness increase as we realize and feel it. The apostle prays, that believers might “know the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge.” And why? Not⁴ that they may rest there, as the limit and verge of Christian

attainment. No!—But that enriched by such knowledge, they might be led to higher attainments, and be “filled with ALL THE FULNESS OF GOD!” Few are found to approach to this elevation of piety: it seems too much for the ordinary frailty and ignorance of our mortal condition. The obituaries of departed saints seldom describe them as having advanced, even when touching on the brink of eternal day, farther than simple reliance and humble faith. To the higher departments of the divine life they have not arrived. Some narrowness of their views, some past neglect of the culture and practice of moral righteousness, some circumstances in their lot unfavourable to the attainment of a more exalted piety, have stunted the growth of the soul, and produced a similar contraction of its enjoyments and hopes. On the other hand, it is consolatory to believe, that not a few who have died in *silent* faith, or, who have dwelt in their departing hours with little stress on the death of Christ, have, nevertheless, died in Him. Their pious friends may have

regretted, that they left the world without having given some more explicit verbal testimony to their reliance on the atonement and grace of the Mediator. And to persons, who have not themselves advanced beyond the first principles of the oracles of God, it may seem, that a cloud of doubt or of mystery must hang over the character, when the thoughts of the dying pilgrim are not more exclusively directed to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. Yet such doubts may be without just grounds. It may be, that the mind was impressed with deep thoughts of God, rapt in visions of celestial blessedness; not regardless of Him who died for our offences, but meditating, in profound repose or solemn anticipation, on the approaching moment, when the disembodied soul should meet its God!—Far from being numbered with those who “die and make no sign,”—it is not too much to suppose, that persons of this description are frequently of the highest order of piety, having reached

that elevation of the soul, when perfect love casteth out fear. They have not forgotten their obligations to the Crucified—but they are now looking forwards to the glory that shall follow; not so much in the spirit of a penitent kneeling at the Cross, as of a believer in the hour of solemn triumph, expecting the promised Crown. Nor is it difficult to imagine, that in proportion to the degree in which the minds of individuals surpass ordinary minds, in deep thought and feeling, the joy of their departing hour may be tempered with a sacred awe, which may appear to bystanders to partake of fear or gloom. Yet is their piety not to be impeached—nor are they to be regarded as being destitute of “the joy of the Lord.” While Christians of more lowly rank, timid, sensitive, still exposed to some trembling fluctuations of hope and fear, are heard to utter passionate exclamations of tender or confiding piety, conscious of weakness, yet reclining on the Saviour, it is conceivable that a Pascal, a Butler, a Milton,

may depart in calm and solemn awe—not proving thereby the weakness of their faith, but the majesty of their reason, the grandeur of their thoughts, the depth of their feeling, and the sublime tranquillity of their souls, in the momentary expectation of Death—of Immortality ! The faith of the Christian has achieved its mightiest triumph, when it has produced this deep repose upon the bed of death—the intellect all awake to the solemn grandeur of the crisis, the heart at the same moment resting on the love of God *.

But to whatever degree of religious confidence we arrive in the present state, one thought is never to be forgotten, with the feeble and with the strong, the Redeemer is present in every hour of need ; nor will He abandon the most helpless—nor will the most powerful be independent of His grace,—until

* Animus—ad summa prorumpit, et pulcherrimo divinorum spectaculo fruitur, æternitatisque suæ memor, in omne quod fuit futurumque est omnibus sæculis, vadit !

126 THE TENDENCY OF CHRISTIAN FAITH.

that consummation shall be announced, in which the mediatorial kingdom ceasing to exist as a distinct administration under Christ, shall be absorbed in the universal dominion of God.

THE END.



